

# HOLY ABANDONMENT

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF  
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ABBOT EMERITUS OF NOTRE DAME DE GRACE, BRICQUEBEC,  
BY  
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## Dedication

To the Most Reverend Jeremias Kinane, D.D.,

Lord Bishop of Waterford and Lismore,

This Translation of "Le Saint Abandon"

Is humbly and respectfully

Inscribed.



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*Introductory Letter of His Paternity, the Most Rev.  
Dom Herman-Joseph Smets, Abbot-General of the  
Cistercians of the Strict Observance*

DEAR SON IN CHRIST,

Allow me to congratulate you most sincerely on the successful completion of the heavy task imposed on you by holy obedience. You have done your part, a modest part indeed but very meritorious, with commendable skill and thoroughness, thereby establishing a further claim to the gratitude of our Order. The work of translation was assuredly very laborious, and withal very wearisome, as lacking that helpful interest which attaches to original compositions; but at the same time it has been, as we may hope, very conducive to the glory of God and the good of souls, hence eminently worthy of your best efforts. There can be no manner of doubt that in making accessible to English readers the sound and sublime doctrine of *Saint Abandon* you have once more rendered signal service to the sacred cause of Religion. In the realisation of this you must find your reward.

*Saint Abandon*, as you know, is the third of the important books given to the world by the Abbot *emeritus* of Notre Dame de Grace, the venerable Dom Vital Lehodey. His first book, entitled *Voies de l'Oraison Mentale*, was published in 1907, and took its place immediately amongst the classical

treatises on mental prayer. It has run through many editions in many languages, winning the highest eulogies from pastors of souls in various countries, even from the Sovereign Pontiff himself. The English translations of this and of the same author's second work, the *Directoire Spirituel*, are also due to the zeal of the scholarly sons of Mount Melleray, and, as I am happy to learn, have been received with general acclamation. I have every confidence that your version of *Saint Abandon* will meet with the like success.

At first sight, the word "abandonment" would seem to suggest something undesirable: the utter abdication of one's dignity as a man and the lowering of oneself to the level of a mere irresponsible automaton. To renounce the exercise of judgment and free choice: what follows from this but the slothful inertia of the fatalist? And can there be either merit or nobility in the futile existence of a withered leaf blown helplessly about by all the winds of heaven? Surely it were a better, a nobler thing to exercise to the fullest the faculties we possess, to assert oneself as a determining force instead of acting the part of a puppet in this universe of warring elements, to fight the good fight for one's place in the sun? It is a specious argument, but it proceeds surely upon a false assumption. Abandonment, as here understood, holy abandonment has nothing whatever in common with fatalistic passivity. Instead of renunciation, it calls for the most active and uninterrupted exercise of our multifarious energies. Holy abandonment means the constant, complete, and loving union of

our wills with the will of God in such sort that “ we do nothing but what He wills and as He wills, and will nothing but what He does.” It means perfect obedience to the commands, counsels, inspirations of His signified will, perfect conformity to the decrees of His good pleasure. We disregard our own delusive lights and inclinations to follow blindly the guidance of an infallible Providence, as a little child surrenders itself with absolute confidence to its mother’s care, as if it had neither eyes, nor ears, nor feet of its own. This is a comparison often used ; it is sufficiently apt, but there are important points of disparity : *omne simile claudicat*. The child is really passive and from physical necessity, whereas in holy abandonment one makes and keeps oneself so by constant, always laborious, and often extremely painful efforts of the will. It is no easy task to hold the different powers of the sensitive and rational order in due subordination to the Divine Will. Inertia, therefore, has no place in abandonment. With regard to the question of dignity, could the human intellect be more honourably employed than in seeking to ascertain and to second the designs of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness? Or the human will than in conforming itself to the living rule of all righteousness? Thereby our faculties are not renounced but ennobled. The conformity of abandonment must not be confounded with the Nirvana of Buddhism, for so far from extinguishing, it rather intensifies our personal life and activity. Conformity implies not a *unity* but a *union*.

A very suitable sub-title for *Saint Abandon* would

be, I think : “ How to be happy.” It would truly describe the nature of abandonment, and would show thereby the importance of the book and the universality of its appeal. For happiness is a subject in which all must acknowledge an interest. The yearning for it is so deeply and strongly implanted in our human nature, so inseparably interwoven with the innermost fibres of our being, that it can be neither eradicated nor resisted. It does not come within the province of free choice at all : we may freely choose to seek our happiness in this particular way or that, but to seek it in some way is a matter not of choice but necessity. It is a tendency analogous to the force of gravity in bodies, not alone as being universal and irresistible, but also in that it is the ultimate root and mainspring of all our particular tendencies.

The pursuit of happiness is therefore a necessity ; so much all will be ready to admit. But have we any hope of attaining the object of our quest? None, replies the Pessimist. That which we pursue so eagerly, so inevitably, is nothing but a will-o'-the-wisp, a phantom, a mocking mirage. Tantalus in his pond truly typifies the fate of humanity. Surely of all the mad systems put forward in the name of Philosophy Pessimism is the maddest.

Others answer in the affirmative, and seek their happiness in those earthly goods and enjoyments which intoxicate the sense and leave the heart empty. They spend their lives endeavouring to gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles. And their cry of disillusionment and despair is ever in our ears : *vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas et*

*afflictio spiritus*. One of the disillusioned has given us the explanation: "Thou hast made our hearts for Thyself, O Lord, and never shall they rest until they rest in Thee."

The Christian knows that happiness, true happiness, is attainable, yet only in God in the immortal life to come. Our one business here below is to merit it by penance, self-denial, and all manner of cross-carrying. But is there any kind or degree of happiness possible in this world? Most certainly, and the secret lies in holy abandonment. We call him happy who has it always in his power to gratify all his desires, contrary to whose will nothing ever occurs or can occur. This obviously is true of God alone, the Sovereign Ruler and Master of all events. But if we could only make His will ours by perfect conformity, it would also, in a secondary sense, be true of us. Is such conformity possible? Yes, to the man of strong and vivid faith. With such a faith we shall realise that whatever befalls us, joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain, success or failure, has been chosen and specially designed for us by our Heavenly Father, Who is infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, and loves each one of us with a love inexpressible, and consequently, no matter about appearances, must be for our greatest advantage, just what we would wish for ourselves, had we full understanding of our highest interests. Every occurrence shall thus appear to us as an effect of omnipotent, omniscient Love, designed either to cure our maladies or multiply our merits, and so shall become the object of our free volition. We shall feel



intimately convinced, we shall *know* that, so far as we personally are concerned, everything happens for the best in the best of all possible worlds. This is the optimism of St. Paul: *Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum*, which explains another inspired oracle: "Whatever befalls the just man it shall not make him sad." For our wills being merged, absorbed, so to speak, in the Divine Will, nothing can be or occur otherwise than as we would have it. So shall we be happy.

The life of abandonment, happy as it is, may be and inevitably must be a life of suffering: the more sublime the spiritual state the more deeply is it marked with the Sign of the Cross. For suffering is not incompatible with essential happiness which depends not on the feelings but on the will. Our Saviour was essentially happy during His Passion, and St. Laurence on his gridiron; and the same happiness is enjoyed by the Holy Souls amid the ardours of the purgatorial flames. Do we not hear the great Apostle declaring that he abounded with joy in all his tribulations? We have here the paradox of Christianity. When we are weak, then are we strongest, we mount by descending, we save our life by losing it, mourning is our blessedness, and poverty our wealth. This is the secret hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed to the little ones, that is, to souls who by holy abandonment have reduced themselves to nothingness so that God may be all in all. No littleness can be less than nothing.

Is it necessary to observe that the abandonment here described differs *toto coelo* from the proud

apathy affected by the Stoic and the equally proud passivity of the Quietist? No man leads a more strenuous life than he who practises Christian abandonment. He must be constantly suppressing his natural feelings and inclinations, and bringing them into harmony with the will of God. And who does not know that we have to exert ourselves much more in resisting our propensities than in yielding to them?

Holy abandonment, in the orthodox sense, sounds quite simple and easy. No doubt, in a state of innocence, where the passions would be entirely subject to reason and reason to God, it would be in practice just as simple as it sounds. But in our fallen condition the case is far otherwise. We must remember that abandonment is the loftiest of the spiritual states. Heavily handicapped as we are with all kinds of evil instincts and inclinations, we cannot hope to reach the summit of spirituality at a single bound, but have to advance slowly and painfully, from simple resignation to willing acceptance, and therefrom to the goal of perfect conformity. It is a narrow, steep, and rugged way, flanked all along with frightful precipices, beset at every turn with manifold dangers and difficulties. Woe to him who undertakes to travel it without the help of a good road-map or an experienced guide! Happy he who, possessing such an advantage, perseveres in his purpose unto the end! He shall enjoy as close an approximation as is possible to a heaven upon earth.

It seems to me that nobody has ever more fully and carefully mapped out this tortuous path, from

its beginning in the low-lying valley to its ending on the towering heights, than Dom Lehodey in the present treatise. Assuredly he was well equipped for his task. Thoroughly grounded in the scholastic philosophy and theology, widely and intimately acquainted with the masters of the spiritual life, he brought to the work in addition the great advantage of long experience in the conduct of privileged souls. And in reference to this life of holy abandonment, he might appropriate the words of the angelic guide to Tobias : “ I know it and I have often walked all the ways thereof ” (*Tob. iv, 8*).

Two things in particular will strike the reader of this book : first, the emphasis laid upon obedience as the touchstone of true virtue and the foundation of all sanctity ; second, the prominence given to the cross. Nothing could be better suited to the times in which we live, times characterised beyond all others by the love of independence and the passionate pursuit of pleasure. Judging, perhaps, by the ever-increasing mildness of Lenten Pastorals, Christians apparently have come to imagine that penance nowadays is not so necessary as heretofore, that the way to salvation and sanctity has been in some measure asphalted or at least steamrolled. But Dom Lehodey makes us realise that, whatever may have been done to facilitate our earthly journeys, the journey to Paradise still remains as laborious as ever.

With regard to your translation, dear Son, it appears to be accurate and fluent enough. The Censors also have reported upon it favourably. It should, therefore, have a wide circulation through-

out the English-speaking world, and so become the means of incalculable good. May the Divine Author of all good bring this hope to realisation, and bless you with His choicest gifts in time and eternity. To the Same, the King of Ages, immortal and invisible, be honour and glory for ever and ever.

DOM HERMAN-JOSEPH SMETS,

*Abbot-Genl., O.C.R.*

ROME, October 7th, 1934.



## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

**S***AIN*T ABANDON, written during the World-War, was first published at the time of the Peace Conferences fifteen years ago, as if to remind the Treaty-makers that a true and lasting peace, for nations as for individuals, must be established on the solid foundation of obedience to the Divine Law: that there can be peace on earth only for men of good-will who give to God in the Highest the glory which is due to Him. Appearing thus at an opportune moment, it soon came to be accepted in religious circles in France and Belgium as something of a classic in its kind. Amongst the many pastors of souls who hastened to congratulate the venerable author on its special excellence was the Supreme Pastor himself, the illustrious Pius .XI.

The year 1927 witnessed the publication of the fifth French edition, which brought the total number of copies up to the respectable figure of 16,000. When we consider the subject-matter, such success must strike us as phenomenal. For *Saint Abandon* possesses none of the qualities supposed to be essential to the constitution of a "best seller": it most emphatically is *not* the kind of book that would make a pleasant holiday companion, or serve to beguile the tedium of a long train-journey, or to brighten up the atmosphere of a dentist's waiting-room. Not that it can be fairly described as a dull book. Quite the contrary. It will prove to be a volume of thrilling interest to those whose most

pressing problem is not how to kill time, but how to turn that gift of God to best account for the profit of their immortal souls. It requires to be studied, however, not lightly skimmed, and studied in relation to the practical conduct of life. For it is pre-eminently a serious book, intended for serious people, with the very prosaic purpose of helping them to attain the end of their existence. The author, indeed, has primarily in view his own Cistercian brethren, but his work will be found equally suitable for religious of other Orders, for secular priests, even for pious lay-folk, for all, in fact, who are seriously engaged in the pursuit of Christian perfection. Spiritual directors, in particular, will find it a wonderful help. This Translation is made from the edition of 1927.

In a short Preface to the fourth edition, Dom Lehodey announces that one of the works from which he has cited several passages has been condemned by the Holy Office ; but that, as his citations contain nothing heterodox, he is quite free to retain them. However, out of respect for the Roman authorities, he has suppressed the names of both the book and its author.

I take this opportunity to thank the Rev. Censors for their kindness in facilitating my work, and especially our venerated Diocesan, the Most Rev. Dr. Kinane, for condescending to accept the Dedication.

AILBE J. LUDDY, O.CIST.

MOUNT MELLERAY ABBEY,

*October 1st, 1934.*

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

**Y**ET another book on Holy Abandonment ! Are there not already authors enough who have dealt clearly and exhaustively with this subject? Rodriguez, in his *Practice of Christian Perfection*, has left us an excellent treatise on *Conformity to the Will of God*; he is a master to whom one always returns with pleasure and profit. The same doctrine is found condensed in some solid, judicious, and practical pages of Saint-Jure's great work: *De la Connaissance et de l'Amour du Fils de Dieu, Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (1, iii, cc. viii et xxiv). To Drexélius we owe the justly esteemed *Heliotrope*; whilst the writings of De Caussade: his *l'Abandon à la divine Providence* (the Virtue and the State), his *Spiritual Counsels*, and his *Letters of Direction*, are still better known. As a matter of fact, every author who has given us an account of the spiritual life has inevitably addressed himself to the subject of Conformity with the Divine Will: for instance, Le Gaudier (*De perf. vitæ spirit.*, p. iii, sect. ii), and Le Marchand (*Ex. spirit. de S. Ign.*, t. i, §§ i et suiv.). Almost in our own times from the graceful pen of Mgr. Gay issued that truly delightful tract, *l'Abandon à Dieu* (Vie et Vert. Chrèt., xiv); and quite recently we have welcomed the publication of Desurmont's very remarkable work on *Providence* (*Oeuvres comp.*, t. ii). We might name many other distinguished authors, but



have to content ourselves with two, and these we desire to mention with special honour : St. Francis de Sales and St. Alphonsus de' Liguori. Both have written admirably on the subject with which we are now occupied : the former in his *Amour de Dieu* (ii, viii-ix) ; in his *Entretiens* (ii, vi, xv, xxi, xxii), equally instructive and charming,<sup>1</sup> and in his Letters of Direction ; the latter in his valuable little dissertation, *De la Conformité à la Volonté de Dieu*, in his *Pratique de l'Amour envers Jésus-Christ*, in his *Vraie épouse de Jésus-Christ* (cc. xiii, xiv, etc.), a work that cannot be too highly appreciated, and in other of his numerous publications.

Of good authors, consequently, there is no lack. Nevertheless, it has seemed to us that there is still room for an additional treatise, a treatise at once theoretic and practical which would borrow what is best in other books, supplement them one from another, and offer a solution for certain problems peculiar to our own times.

Outside the traditional school, we find two mutually antagonistic theories of Holy Abandonment. The one regards it as a sort of exaltation of the soul, causing her to run forward to meet sufferings and at least implicitly to pray for them ; under colour of generosity, she, in a sense, takes the initiative in matters as to which God has reserved the decision to Himself. According to the other theory, the soul should maintain a purely passive attitude, renouncing all foresight and personal efforts. The advocates of this view

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<sup>1</sup> All our citations are taken from the edition published by Briday at Lyons in the year 1868.

appeal, but most unreasonably, to the authority of St. Francis de Sales.

It will be observed that the first of these theories allows more than is right to human endeavour and restricts unduly the action of Providence; whereas the second, under the pretext of "letting God act," deprives the soul of all activity. They are the Scylla and Charybdis, the two extremes we shall have to avoid if we would attribute their due shares to the actions both of God and the creature. To steer our own course in the Golden Mean, we shall, on the one hand, permit Providence to dispose of us according to all its rights; and, on the other, instead of impeding the divine action, offer it a full and passive submission, together with all the intelligent and active co-operation which it demands from us.

Precise doctrine in this matter is of the utmost importance, for there is question of the principles which govern our life. On the other hand, the object of our study fairly bristles with difficulties. Is it, then, any wonder that we approach our task with more than a little anxiety? What somewhat reassures us is the firm resolution we have taken to follow unswervingly the traditional teaching, and to that end we shall put ourselves under the absolutely safe guidance of SS. Francis de Sales and Alphonsus de' Liguori. Founders of religious Orders, saints themselves and makers of saints, they shall be our masters and models. Our confidence increases at the thought that the Church has officially placed them both in the ranks of her illustrious Doctors. The Doctor of Piety is the title given to St. Francis

de Sales. St. Alphonsus, incomparable as a moralist, equally eminent as a dogmatic theologian and as a controversialist, is also one of the most authoritative masters of the spiritual life ; his numerous ascetical works are replete with sound doctrine and penetrating unction. Both Saints, as already remarked, have written admirable treatises on Holy Abandonment, and both lived no less admirably in the practice thereof.

These two Doctors we have chosen as our especial guides because, being full of living faith and sublime charity, and animated with the spirit of heroic self-denial, they always manifest a sovereign respect for the holy will of God ; they love and adore it ; wheresoever it appears it at once attracts their attention ; and they invariably incline to that side where it seems to be in any degree more in evidence. Nevertheless, so far from desiring to depreciate our human activity, they preserve to it all its rights. As for what concerned their own conduct, they exercised all their intelligence and all their energy in order to co-operate more perfectly with the divine will and to enable it to accomplish its beneficent purposes. We shall often cite both of them in the present work, but St. Francis de Sales more frequently, for the reason that the Semi-Quietists have endeavoured to claim him as their champion. His doctrine, as the reader can easily see for himself, needs no justification. One has but to contemplate it as a whole to recognise it as absolutely orthodox.

We shall divide our Treatise into four parts, in which we shall study successively the Nature, the

Foundation, the Object, and the Fruits of Holy Abandonment. Not content with discussing each of these questions from the purely theoretical standpoint, we shall also, and with particular care, apply ourselves to develop their more practical aspects, in order to furnish tried souls—and where is the soul that is not tried?—with ample matter for very useful meditations, and to comfort and encourage them to the best of our poor ability. God grant that all who read these pages may with the help of His grace derive therefrom a faith full of vigour and a dauntless courage so that, instead of murmuring against His divine hand when it strikes them for their good, they shall rather kiss it with filial love and confidence! In this way shall their sufferings bring them consolation in time and the most magnificent of rewards in eternity. For ourselves, we shall esteem it only too great a happiness to have contributed something, however little, to the glory of our well-beloved Master and to the profit of the souls so dear to His Heart.



## FIRST PART

# NATURE OF HOLY ABANDONMENT

## CHAPTER I

### GOD'S WILL, THE SUPREME RULE OF LIFE

**W**E want to save our souls and to tend to the perfection of the spiritual life. That is to say, we want to purify ourselves thoroughly, to make progress in all the virtues, to attain to loving union with God, and so in a sense to transform ourselves into Him ever more and more. This is the sole occupation to which we have exclusively consecrated our lives. It is a work of incomparable grandeur, yet also one that involves almost endless toil. It offers us liberty of spirit, peace and joy of heart, and the sweet unction of the Holy Ghost; but, on the other hand, it demands of us sacrifices innumerable and the patient labour of a lifetime. An undertaking so colossal would assuredly be not only difficult but utterly impossible to us, were we left dependent upon our own resources, for it belongs to the purely supernatural order. But "I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me" (*Phil.* iv, 13). Without God, we are absolutely powerless, unable to do anything at all meritorious of eternal life; as St. Paul says: we cannot of ourselves even think or will what is good, much less bring it to accomplishment (*II Cor.* iii, 5; *Phil.* ii, 13). We have still greater reason to despair of ourselves and to put all our trust in divine grace when our object is the eradication of vice, the perfect acquisition of virtue, and a life of intimate union with God.

What a paradoxical being is man! utterly helpless, and at the same time omnipotent! Apart from God, he is so weak and resourceless that he cannot so much as conceive a good thought; whereas, with the divine

assistance, enterprises the most sublime are within his competence. Happily, God has condescended to make Himself "the support of our salvation" (*Ps. lxxxviii, 27*), for which we can never sufficiently thank Him. Nevertheless, He will not save us without our co-operation. Consequently, we must unite our activity with His, and all the more zealously for the reason that without His support we shall labour in vain.

Our sanctification, even our salvation, is therefore the work of two. The action of God is of absolute necessity and so likewise is our co-operation: there must be an uninterrupted harmony between the divine will and the human. Whoso works with God is continually advancing in virtue, whilst he who chooses to depend upon his own efforts either falls into sin or, at best, wearies himself with unprofitable agitation. Hence it is a matter of supreme importance to maintain this alliance on all occasions and in all our actions, the least as well as the greatest, since otherwise we lose both our labour and our time. How many actions which to men appear to be perfect are yet empty of merit in the sight of God, simply because He has had no part in them! For that reason, in spite of the trouble they may have cost us, they have as little value for eternity as if they had never been done at all.

But if God participates in the work of our sanctification, we must from first to last allow Him the direction of the enterprise: nothing is to be done save in accordance with His designs, under His orders, and by the inspirations of His grace. He is the First Principle and the Last End of all things, whilst we are only His creatures, created to accomplish His will. In His goodness He has called us to "a school of divine service" (*Holy Rule of St. Benedict, Prol.*) in order there to make Himself our Teacher; He has placed us in "the workshop of the monastery" (*ibid.*) in order there to direct our labour; "He has enrolled us under His standard" (*Holy Rule, iv.*) so that He may lead us Himself to the combat. For

to the Sovereign Master belongs the right to command, to infallible Wisdom the right to make all arrangements; the creature can collaborate, but only in subordination to the Creator's will.

This continual dependence will doubtless impose on us manifold renunciations. It will demand of us the sacrifice of our short-sighted views, of our whims and caprices. Nature, of course, will complain, but we must turn a deaf ear to her murmurings. What greater blessing could befall us than to have the divine wisdom for our guide, the divine omnipotence for our support, and to be associated with God in the work of our salvation? Moreover, all the profit of this joint enterprise comes to us. God demands as His share only the glory that exclusively belongs to Him and the pleasure of benefiting us; the rest He leaves to His human collaborators. And what do these gain? The perfection of their nature, elevation to a higher mode of existence, the only true prosperity attainable in this life, and the pledge of eternal happiness in the life to come. Oh! if we could but comprehend the designs of God and our own real interests, we should have no other desire than to be perfectly submissive to Him, no other fear but the fear of failing in submission; we should entreat Him and weary Him with our entreaties that His holy will might be accomplished in us rather than our own. But how foolish we should be, and how unfortunate, were we to abandon so wise and powerful a Leader in order to follow our own delusive lights and to live according to our fancies!

Here is a further consideration which will show us how truly it can be said that the love of God and the accomplishment of His will "is all man" (*Eccles. xii, 13*). The divine will, taken in general, is for us the ultimate criterion of what is good, "the sole rule of what is just and perfect," as St. Alphonsus expresses it. And the measure in which we accomplish that will is also the measure of our advancement.

"If thou *wilt enter into life*, keep the commandments"



(*Matt.* xix, 17). Therefore, in order to obtain admission into the kingdom of heaven, it is not enough to cry: Lord! Lord! We have also to do the will of Our Father Who is in heaven (*Id.* viii, 21). "He that remains united to the will of God lives and saves his soul; he that prefers to follow his own will dies and is lost."<sup>1</sup>

"If thou *wilt be perfect*, go sell what thou hast . . . and come, follow Me" (*Matt.* xix, 21). That is to say: accomplish the will of God with more completeness, by adding the observance of the counsels to that of the precepts.

If thou *wilt mount to the very summit of perfection*, accomplish the will of God with ever-growing exactitude and generosity. You will advance in proportion as your obedience becomes more universal in its object, more exact in its execution, more supernatural in its motives, more perfect in the dispositions of your will. "Search the Scriptures" (*John* v, 39), examine the life and teaching of Our Saviour: you shall find that nothing more is demanded of you but "the faith that worketh by charity" (*Gal.* v, 6), and the love that proves its loyalty by keeping the word of God. Your perfection, in a word, will be commensurate with the perfection of your obedience to the divine will.

So important is this point that we judge it well to adduce some authorities in support of our statements.

"Never forget this great truth," writes the elder St. Teresa: "namely, that they who are beginning to devote themselves to prayer should first of all endeavour with all their power, with all their courage, and by every possible means, to conform their wills to the will of God. In this conformity, believe me, consists the most sublime perfection of the spiritual life. . . . Do not imagine, then, that our advancement depends on something esoteric and extraordinary. No, all our spiritual progress is measured by the degree of our conformity to the divine will."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Voie du Salut*, 1<sup>re</sup> p., med. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Château*, 11<sup>dem</sup>, 1.

"Everyone"—so speaks St. Francis de Sales—"seems to have his own peculiar ideas as to what constitutes spiritual perfection. Some make it to consist in the practice of austerity in dress or in food, others seek it in almsgiving, in the frequentation of the Sacraments, in prayer, in a certain kind of passive and sublime contemplation, or in those extraordinary graces which theologians call *gratiae gratis datae*. Such persons deceive themselves. They mistake the effect for the cause, the accessory for the principal, the shadow for the substance. For my own part, I neither know nor understand any other perfection than that which consists in loving God with one's whole heart and one's neighbour as oneself." The holy Doctor completes his thought in another place, where he says: "Devotion (or perfection) adds nothing to the fire of charity except the flame which renders charity prompt, active and diligent, not alone in keeping the commandments, but also in practising the counsels and following divine inspirations."<sup>3</sup>

The following is from Rodriguez: "Just as the love of God is the most sublime and perfect form of virtue, so perfect submission to the divine will is the best and purest expression, the fairest flower of that love. . . . Besides, is it not manifest that, since there can be nothing so good and perfect as the will of God, in the measure in which we conform ourselves thereto, in that measure precisely do we become virtuous and holy?"<sup>4</sup>

A learned disciple of St. Alphonsus sums up the holy Doctor's teaching in these words: "They for whom sanctity signifies the multiplication of penances, Communions, and vocal prayers, labour manifestly under a delusion. For such practices are good only in so far as God wills them. Out of harmony with His will, so far from giving Him pleasure, they rather merit His detestation and punishment. Therefore, they are only intended to serve as means to unite our wills to His. Let me repeat it: all perfection, all sanctity consists in

<sup>3</sup> *Espirit.*, 1<sup>re</sup> p., xxix.

<sup>4</sup> *Perf. Chrét.*, 8<sup>e</sup> tr., c. I.

faithfully accomplishing that which God requires of us. The divine will is the norm of all goodness and of all virtue. Being holiness itself, it sanctifies whatever it touches, even indifferent actions when they are done to please God. . . . If, therefore, we wish to sanctify our souls, this should be our one aim : never to follow our own wills, but always the divine. For the whole multiplicity of precepts and counsels can be reduced to the single injunction that we do and suffer whatsoever God wills and as He wills. Hence the essentials of perfection may be expressed in the formula : Do all that God wills, will all that God does.”<sup>5</sup>

But now let us hear St. Alphonsus himself : “ All our perfection consists in the love of our God, infinitely amiable, and the perfection of love is found in the union of our wills with the divine. . . . If then we desire to gratify fully the heart of our God, we must endeavour not merely to conform but to identify, if I may so speak, our wills with His, so that there shall no longer be two wills but only one. . . . The saints have always contented themselves with just doing the will of God, convinced that this alone constituted their spiritual perfection. The Lord described David as a man according to His own heart, precisely because that great King was ever ready to follow the direction of the divine will. And if Mary, the Virgin Mother, was the most perfect of all the saints, she owes her pre-eminence to the fact that she surpassed all others in the perfection of her constant union with the will of God.”<sup>6</sup>

As for Him Who is the Saint of saints, the Love of our hearts, and the Model of all perfection, how otherwise can one describe His earthly career save as a continual exercise of love and obedience? In His devotion to the heavenly Father and to men, He substitutes Himself for the unavailing holocausts and becomes the universal Victim. The path marked out by the will of His Father shall lead Him through all kinds of sufferings and

<sup>5</sup> Omer, *Prat. de la perf.*, c. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Confor.*, 1.

humiliations, even to death, and the death of the cross. He knows it. It was the desire to accomplish this crucifying but life-giving will that brought Him down from heaven. At His entrance into this world He announced that He had placed His Father's will in the centre of His Heart to be the object of His love, and inscribed it on His Hands to be faithfully accomplished. (*Ps.* xxxix, 7-8; *Heb.* x, 5-9.) This loving obedience will be His nourishment, will sum up His hidden life, and will be the inspiration of His public life, so that He will be able to say: "I always do the things that please My Father" (*John* viii, 29). Yea, and at the moment of His death, He will utter His loud cry of triumph: "It is consummated" (*John* xix, 30). As if He would say: "My Father, I have carried My love for Thee to the furthest possible limit. I have accomplished the work of Redemption, because I have done Thy will in all things, without failing in the least jot or tittle."

To identify our wills with the will of God: there you have the summit of perfection, according to St. Alphonsus. "We should, therefore," he continues, "aspire without ceasing to such identification. It should be the one object of all our actions, of all our desires, of all our meditations, of all our petitions."<sup>7</sup> After the example of our beloved Jesus, let us in all things see nothing but the heavenly Father's will. Let it be our sole ambition to accomplish the same with ever-increasing fidelity, with untiring generosity, and from motives purely supernatural. So shall we follow the Saviour with giant strides here, and mount nigh to Him in glory hereafter. "One day in vision the Blessed Stephanie Soncino, Dominicaness, was carried up into heaven. There she beheld many souls, whom she had known on earth, placed in the ranks of the seraphim. At the same time it was revealed to her that they had merited their exaltation to so sublime a degree of glory by having lived their mortal lives in perfect union with the will of God."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*

## CHAPTER II

### THE SIGNIFIED WILL OF GOD AND HIS WILL OF GOOD-PLEASURE

**T**HE divine will manifests itself to us as regulative and as operative. As regulative, it is the supreme rule of goodness, variously signified to us; and, as has been said, we ought to follow it faithfully, because all that it wills is good and nothing is good except what it wills. As operative, it is the universal principle of being, of life, and of action. Everything is done according to its behests,<sup>1</sup> nothing happens independently of its decrees; there is no effect but proceeds from it as from its first cause, nor any motion which it does not originate as prime mover. And consequently there is no event, whether small or great, which does not reveal some volition of the divine good-pleasure whereto we are obliged to submit, since God has a perfect right to dispose of us as seems good to Him.

God therefore manifests His will to us in two ways: by the rules He has made for us and by the various events which He causes to occur in our lives. In the former we have the signified will of God, in the latter His will of good-pleasure.

By His signified will "God proposes to us clearly and in advance the truths He would have us believe, the rewards He would have us hope for, the penalties He would have us fear, the good He would have us love, the commandments He would have us observe, the counsels He would have us follow. This is called the signified will, because by it God indicates and makes known to us what

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<sup>1</sup> We shall explain further on how man, even by the sinful abuse of his liberty, so far from frustrating the designs of God, really concurs to their realisation.

He has ordained and intends should be the objects of our faith, of our hope, of our fear, of our love, and of our practice. We are therefore conformed to the signified will when our wills embrace whatever the divine goodness indicates to be an object of its intention, when we believe according to its teaching, hope according to its promises, fear according to its menaces, love and live according to its ordinances and admonitions.”<sup>2</sup>

“The signified will comprises a fourfold object: the commandments of God and of His Church, the evangelical counsels, divine inspirations, our particular rules and constitutions.

“Obedience to the commandments, both divine and ecclesiastical, is of obligation for all, because there is question here of the absolute will of God, Who has made submission to these ordinances a condition of salvation. With regard to the counsels, He certainly would like us to observe them also, yet He rather desires this than wills it absolutely. Hence we do not forfeit His friendship by failing in courage to undertake the practice of the counsels, provided we do not treat them with contempt. We are not even permitted to take upon us the observance of them all, but of such of them only as are conformable to our state of life, some of the counsels being opposed to others. . . . As they have been given us to promote the interests of charity, it is for charity to regulate the mode and measure of their practice. . . . The counsels which we as religious are under obligation to observe are those which are comprehended in our rule.”<sup>3</sup> For us, our vows, our monastic laws and regulations, the commands and counsels of our superiors, are all the expression of the divine will prescribing to us the duties of our state. Surely we have reason to bless our good Master, Who with such loving solicitude manifests His will with regard to the community and its individual members, even as concerns the minutest details of conduct.

<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Amour de Dieu*, I, viii, c. iii.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, *Entret.*, xv, et *Amour de Dieu*, I, viii, c. v à ix.

By means of His inspirations God manifests His will for each of us in a more personal manner. Inspiration came to St. Mary of Egypt from looking at an image of Our Lady, to St. Antony from hearing the Gospel read at Mass, to the Duke of Gandia (St. Francis Borgia) from contemplating the corpse of an empress, to St. Pacomius from observing an example of charity, to St. Augustine from listening to incidents in the life of St. Antony, to St. Ignatius of Loyola from reading the lives of the saints. In short, inspirations reach us through very different channels. Some can be considered extraordinary only in so far as they send us to our accustomed exercises with unusual fervour. Others are called extraordinary because they urge us to the performance of actions contrary to the laws, rules, or established practices of Holy Church, which by consequence are rather to be admired than imitated. The pious Bishop of Geneva (St. Francis de Sales) tells us by what signs we can recognise authentic divine inspirations and how we ought to use them, concluding with the words: "God signifies His will to us by means of His inspirations. But He does not ordain that we should always be able of ourselves to decide whether a particular inspiration is truly from Him, still less that we should follow inspirations at random. In such cases of doubt we must not expect Him to enlighten us Himself or to send one of His angels to do so; but if the matter be important He wants us to have recourse to those whom He has charged with our direction." <sup>4</sup>

Let us add, in fine, that the examples of Our Lord and the saints, the theory and practice of the virtues, all belong to the signified will of God. It is easy to assign them to one or other of the four categories referred to above.

"We now understand how God manifests to us what is called His signified will. But there is also His will of good-pleasure which we must look for in all events. I mean to say, in everything that befalls us: in sickness,

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<sup>4</sup> *Amour de Dieu*, I, viii, c. x à xiii; et *Entret.*, xv.

in death, in affliction, in consolation, in adversity and prosperity; briefly, in all unforeseen occurrences.”<sup>5</sup> The divine will can be seen without difficulty in the events which come directly from God as their Author. It is the same with such as originate from necessary causes, for these causes can only act under God’s impulse, and they offer no resistance to His influence. But it is in tribulations especially we must recognise the will of God; not that He loves these for their own sake, but He employs them as an effective means of vindicating right order, of remedying our failings, of healing and sanctifying our souls. Furthermore, we have to see His will, yet only a permissive will, even in our own sins and in those of our neighbour. God, of course, does not concur in the formal element of sin which constitutes its malice; rather He hates it with an infinite hatred, He does all that depends on Him to deter us therefrom, He condemns it and visits it with His chastisement. But since we cannot perform any action without His concurrence, in order not to impede the exercise of the liberty wherewith He has endowed us, He gives that concurrence for the material act of sin, which belongs in truth to the natural use of our faculties. Moreover, He wills to draw good out of evil, and, with that object in view, to make our own and our neighbour’s shortcomings serve for the sanctification of souls through the practice of penitence, patience, humility, mutual support and forbearance, etc. He wills also that we should sustain our neighbour even whilst fulfilling in his regard the duty of fraternal correction, and that we should obey him as our rule requires, seeing in his necessities and his faults the instruments God makes use of to exercise us in virtue. On this account, St. Francis de Sales does not hesitate to declare that it is chiefly through our neighbour we learn what God demands of us. The signified will of God differs profoundly from His will of good-pleasure in three respects :

Firstly, the signified will is always made known to us

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<sup>5</sup> *Idem, Entret., xv.*



in advance, and as a rule very clearly, by the usual expressions of thought, viz., speech and writing. Thus we have the Gospels, the laws of the Church, our holy rule; we can at our convenience read therein the will of God, commit it to memory, and make it the subject of our meditation. Divine inspirations and the commands of superiors are only apparent exceptions, inasmuch as they have for object the maintenance of the written law, either the common Christian law or the monastic. On the other hand, we hardly ever know God's will of good-pleasure otherwise than through the sequence of events. The qualified expression — hardly ever — is employed, because to this rule there are real exceptions. Thus we can be certain beforehand as to what God intends to do in the future, if He has been pleased to inform us. One may also acquire this knowledge by presentiment, by conjecture, or surmise, either from the actual trend of affairs, or from wise precautions taken, or from imprudences committed. But in general the divine good-pleasure is only revealed by the course of events which ordinarily lie beyond our prevision. Even during the actual occurrence of events God's will for us may remain obscure. For instance, He sends us sickness, spiritual aridity, or some other such trial. This, we know, is His present good-pleasure. But for how long? And what is to be the issue? We know not.

Secondly, it is always in our power either by obedience to conform to the signified will or to withdraw ourselves therefrom by disobedience. For by this will God ordains to place in our hands life and death, and leaves us to choose, until the day of judgment, between submission to His law and transgression. By His will of good-pleasure, on the contrary, He disposes of us as our Sovereign Master. Without consulting us, often even against our wishes, He puts us in the position He has chosen, and under the obligation of discharging the duties thereof. It remains in our power indeed to satisfy this obligation or not, to conform ourselves to the divine good-

pleasure or to revolt against it; but whether we like it or not, we have no choice save to submit to the sequence of events, the course of which can be arrested by no earthly power. Thus, as Supreme Ruler and Judge, God restores order and punishes sin; as Father and Saviour, He reminds us of our dependence, and endeavours to recall us to the paths of duty as often as we wander out of them and lose our way.

Thirdly, from what has been said it follows that God demands obedience to His signified will as an effect of our own free choice and determination. In order to observe a commandment or a point of rule, to produce acts of the theological or moral virtues, we require no doubt a secret grace which forestalls and assists us, a grace which we can always obtain by prayer and fidelity. But the will of God being clearly indicated, when the moment for its fulfilment arrives, we have to act by our own free determination; there is no need to wait for a sensible movement of grace or for a special motion of the Holy Spirit, whatever the Semi-Quietists, ancient or modern, may say to the contrary effect. On the other hand, if there is question of the will of good-pleasure, we must wait until God declares it by the course of events. Before this is done, we cannot tell what He requires of us. But then we understand what that is clearly enough: submission to His good-pleasure in the first place, and next the discharge of the duties appertaining to such or such a position chosen for us by Him.

In relation to this point, St. Francis de Sales makes a very true remark: "There are some cases," he writes, "where we have to unite the signified will of God to the will of His good-pleasure." As an example, he brings forward the case of a sick person. Besides submission to Divine Providence, such a one has to fulfil the special duties incumbent on the sick, viz., he must practise patience and abnegation, and obey with constant fidelity all the prescriptions of the signified will, apart from the exceptions and dispensations which his malady

justifies. The holy Doctor insists much upon this point, because in such circumstances, "so long as the divine good-pleasure remains unknown to us, we should attach ourselves with all our strength to the signified will, accomplishing with the greatest care whatever belongs to its object. But the moment the will of good-pleasure becomes apparent we must render to it at once our loving obedience, always prepared to submit in things pleasant or otherwise, in life or in death, in everything, in short, that is not manifestly opposed to God's signified will, for this takes the precedence." <sup>6</sup>

This doctrine may seem somewhat dry. Nevertheless, the reader should understand it thoroughly and bear it well in mind, because it will help to illustrate the questions which are to follow.

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<sup>6</sup> *Amour de Dieu*, I, ix, c. vi; *Entret.*, ii et xv passim. [Of course, God's good-pleasure cannot be really opposed to His signified will. Where we find what appears to be such opposition we can be sure that one or other will has been misinterpreted.—*Translator.*]

## CHAPTER III

### ON OBEDIENCE TO THE SIGNIFIED WILL OF GOD

**W**E have already shown that the will of God, taken in general, is the one supreme rule, and that we advance in virtue in proportion as we conform ourselves to its ordinances. In whatever way it manifests itself to us, whether as the signified will or as the will of good-pleasure, it is always the will of God, equally holy and adorable. The work of our sanctification, therefore, implies fidelity to both one and the other. For the moment, however, we shall leave the will of good-pleasure out of our consideration, whilst we stress the importance and necessity of embracing with our whole hearts and during our whole lives the signified will, and regarding its accomplishment as our essential occupation. We shall explain at the end of this chapter why we insist so much on what appears to be an evident truth.

The signified will includes, in the first place, the commandments of God and the Church and the duties of our state in life. These should be, above all, the object of our continual and watchful fidelity, for they constitute the foundation whereon the whole spiritual life rests. Remove this foundation, and the entire edifice comes down in ruin. "Fear God and keep His commandments," says Divine Wisdom, "for this is all man" (*Eccles.* xiii, 14). Perhaps there are some who consider works of supererogation more sanctifying than those to which we are obliged. Persons of this opinion undoubtedly deceive themselves. St. Thomas teaches that perfection consists essentially in the faithful fulfilment of the law (*Summa.* ii, 11; q. 184, a. 3). Besides, we cannot expect to please God with works of supererogation performed at the expense of duty, and by substituting our own wills for His.

Comprehended under the signified will, in the second

place, are the counsels. The more perfectly we follow these, according to our vocation and condition, the more closely shall we resemble our Divine Master Who is at present our Friend and the Spouse of our souls, but Who will one day be our Sovereign Judge. Guided by them, we shall practise the virtues most agreeable to His Divine Heart: gentleness and humility, obedience of intellect and will, virginal chastity, voluntary poverty, perfect detachment, a generosity of devotion that involves the sacrifice and forgetfulness of self. We shall find in them, consequently, a rich treasure of merits and holiness. Moreover, by their faithful observance we shall remove the chief obstacles to the fervour of our charity and the dangers which threaten its very existence. In a word, the counsels serve as bulwarks for the defence of the commandments. On this subject, Joseph de Maistre makes the pertinent remark: "That which suffices is not sufficient. Whoso resolves to do all that is permitted will soon be found doing that which is not; and he that will content himself with what is of strict obligation will be content with a little less before long."

To the object of the signified will belong finally the inspirations of grace. "These inspirations," says Dosda, "are so many rays from the Divine Sun of Justice which fill the soul with light and warmth in order that it may perceive the good and be stimulated to accomplish it. They are pledges of the divine predilection and assume various forms. In turn, and according to the particular occasion, we receive them as attractions, or impulses, or reproaches, or qualms of conscience, or salutary fears, or divine consolations, or elevations of the heart, or as sweet and compelling invitations to the practice of a particular virtue. Such divine inspirations visit frequently pure and interior souls, who should regard it as very important for their progress to follow them with gratitude and fidelity."<sup>1</sup> What precious support they bring us! Good reason, then, had the Apostle to warn his disciples

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<sup>1</sup> *L'Union avec Dieu*, 4<sup>e</sup> p., c. vii.

against "extinguishing the Spirit" (I *Thess.* v, 19), that is, against suppressing the pious movements excited by grace in their hearts.

Is it necessary to add that our submission to the signified will of God, commanding, counselling and inspiring, must continue as long as our earthly existence? We have always to respect His sovereign authority. Never shall we be so rich as to be justified in refusing the treasures of merit to be found in fulfilling the divine will. The loyal observance of its behests is our ordinary means for repressing nature and cultivating the virtues: now, nature does not die, nor shall we ever attain to such a degree of virtue that we cannot advance any more. Though we should live a thousand years, after a thousand years of assiduous labour we should still find ourselves infinitely short of complete resemblance to Our Lord, of being perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

We must not omit to say that, for religious, their vows, their rules, and the orders and directions of their superiors constitute the principal expression of the signified will, the path of duty until death, and the way to sanctity.

Our rules are an absolutely safe guide. The religious life is, as St. Benedict testifies, "a school of divine service,"<sup>2</sup> an incomparable school in which God Himself, as our Master, teaches us, forms us, makes known to us His will for each moment, enlightens us even as to the smallest details of His service. It is He Who assigns us our practices of penance and divine contemplation, and the thousand observances whereby He wills to exercise us in religion, humility, fraternal charity, and the other virtues. He also instructs us with regard to the interior dispositions that render our obedience acceptable to Him and meritorious for ourselves. Is there any necessity, then, asks St. Francis de Sales, that God should manifest His will to us by secret inspirations, visions, or ecstasies? No, for He has given us a much surer guidance in "the sweet and common way of holy submission to the pre-

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<sup>2</sup> Holy Rule, prol.

scriptions of our rules and superiors.”<sup>3</sup> “Happy are you, my daughters,” writes the same holy Doctor elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> addressing a community of nuns, “happy are you in comparison with us who remain in the world. Whenever we inquire the way, one will inform us that it is to the right, another that it is to the left, and in the end we generally find we have been misdirected. But as for you, all you have to do is to allow yourselves to be borne onward, resting peacefully in the ship which carries you. The course you have embarked on is a safe one: follow it without fear. For compass you have Our Lord, your rules represent the ship, and those charged with the guidance of the ship are your superiors, who say to you in effect: Travel by the perpetual observance of your religious obligations and you shall happily attain to God. ‘It is doubtless good to seek God by the observance of rule,’ you will perhaps say to me, ‘but after all that is the common way. God draws us by particular attractions, nor does He lead us all by the same path.’ What you say is very true. But it is no less true that if these attractions proceed from God they will bring you to the practice of obedience.”

Our rules are, ordinarily, the chief means at our disposal for the purification of our souls. Obedience detaches and purifies us continually by the thousand renunciations it imposes, and still more by its demand for the mortification of our judgment and will. Self-will, in the words of St. Alphonsus, is the ruin of the virtues, the source of all evils, the only gate by which sin and imperfection can enter, a demon of the worst type, the favourite weapon of the tempter against religious, the tormentor of its slaves, an anticipated hell. “All religious perfection,” he continues, quoting St. Bonaventure, “consists in the renunciation of self-will. This renunciation equals martyrdom in merit. As the head of the condemned falls under the axe of the executioner, so is the will, the head of the soul, sacrificed to God by the sword of obedience.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Entret.*, iii.<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, xx.<sup>5</sup> *Relig. sanct.*, c. vii.

Our rules are an inexhaustible mine of heavenly treasure, the true riches of the religious life. As opposed to obedience there is only sin and imperfection, and apart from its influence even the best actions lose their value; so, under its auspices everything that is not forbidden by higher authority becomes virtuous, and what was already good becomes still better. Again, to quote St. Alphonsus :<sup>6</sup> " It produces and preserves all the virtues in the soul." Yes, and it multiplies their acts, and thus sanctifying each of our moments, it leaves nothing to nature and gives all to God. Our Divine Master, according to the beautiful expression of St. Bernard, " entertained so high an esteem for this virtue that He practised it till His death, preferring the loss of His life to the loss of His obedience." <sup>7</sup> The saints, consequently, have emulated each other in exalting a virtue so dear to the Saviour, and cultivated it with the utmost solicitude. The Abbot John was able to say, when about to appear before the Judgment-Seat, that he had never done his own will. St. Dositheus could not endure the rigorous fasts of the desert, yet won a very high degree of glory by five years of perfect obedience. St. Joseph Calasancz used to call obedient religious the precious stones of their house. To St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi regular obedience seemed the most direct road to salvation and to sanctity. " Not only so," adds St. Alphonsus,<sup>8</sup> " but in religion it is the one way to these goals, for they cannot be reached by any other. . . . It is mainly a difference in the practise of obedience that distinguishes perfect from imperfect religious." And St. Dorothy says: " When you see a solitary who has abandoned his state and fallen into serious disorders, understand that this misfortune is the result of his insistence on following his own will. For nothing can be so perilous and pernicious as to take as our guide our own spirit, directing our steps by our own lights." <sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>7</sup> *Ad milites Templi*, xiii.<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>9</sup> *Vie des Peres du Désert*, 3<sup>e</sup> p., Désert de Scété.



“ The height of perfection,” so writes St. Teresa the Elder, “ evidently does not consist either in interior consolations, or in sublime raptures, or in visions, or in the gift of prophecy; but rather in rendering our wills so conformed and submissive to God’s will that we embrace with our whole hearts whatsoever He ordains, and accept as gladly the bitter as the sweet the moment we perceive it to be His good-pleasure.” After giving various reasons for this, she adds: “ I am convinced that if the demon, under different pretexts, makes so many attempts to disgust us with obedience, it is because he knows that this virtue will conduct us most speedily to the summit of perfection.” She has known, she tells us, certain religious who were charged by obedience with a multitude of employments and affairs, and seeing them on their return after many years’ absence found them so far advanced in the ways of the spirit that she was filled with astonishment. “ How amiable, then, is obedience, even in the distractions which it imposes, since it can elevate souls to such lofty degrees of perfection !” <sup>10</sup>

St. Francis de Sales speaks at length to the same effect. With regard to those who have so great a desire for their own advancement that they wish to surpass all others in virtue, they would be much better employed, he says, in following the community and keeping their rules: for that is the direct road to God. St. Gertrude, being of a weak constitution, was treated by her superioress with more indulgence than the rest, and was not allowed to practise even the common austerities. “ What practices, think you,” asks the same holy Doctor, “ did that poor girl adopt in order to become a saint? None beyond humbly submitting herself to the will of her spiritual mother. And although her fervour led her to desire to join in the community exercises, she never expressed that desire. When ordered to bed, she made no answer, but simply went, assured that she would there enjoy the presence of

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<sup>10</sup> *Fond.*, c. v.

her Spouse as perfectly as if she remained in choir with her sisters. Our Lord revealed to St. Mechtilde that whosoever wished to find Him in this life should seek Him first in the Sacrament of the Altar, next in the heart of St. Gertrude." After citing other examples, the Saint continues: "We should therefore imitate these holy religious, by applying ourselves with humility and fervour to that which God requires of us according to our vocation, nor must we dream of discovering another and better way to perfection than that marked out by our rules." <sup>11</sup>

And in truth, since it is God Himself Who has chosen for us our state in life and the means of our sanctification, nothing else, clearly, can be better *for us*, nothing else can be even good, outside such state and means. "It is true, the occupation of Martha was holy," says St. Ignatius of Loyola, "as were also Magdalen's contemplation and her penitence, and the tears wherewith she washed the Saviour's feet. But in order to be meritorious, all these actions had to be done in Bethany, that is to say, according to the etymology of the word, in the house of obedience. As if the Lord, to quote St. Bernard, willed to teach us thereby that neither zeal for good works, nor the sweetness of divine contemplation, nor the tears of penitence would have been acceptable to Him apart from obedience." <sup>12</sup>

Obedience to the signified will of God is therefore the normal means of arriving at perfection. But so far from desiring to disparage submission to the will of the divine good-pleasure, we rather proclaim its great importance and decisive influence. To the beneficent action of the rules it contributes what is always a useful support, sometimes even a necessary complement. And this support is the more precious in that it is personal to each of us. The prescriptions of the rule are necessarily general, but God chooses for us the events of His good-pleasure in

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<sup>11</sup> *Entret.*, vii, xv, xx.

<sup>12</sup> *Lettre sur l'obéiss.*

view of our particular needs. Despite of that, it remains none the less true that the signified will must be considered the fixed and regular path amidst the accidental and variable events of life, the task of all our days and of every instant. With this we have to begin, with this to continue, with this to end.

We have deemed it well to remind our readers of this fundamental truth at the beginning of our study, so that the commendations deservedly accorded to holy abandonment may not lead anyone to embrace it with exclusive zeal, as if it were the one or the whole way. Undoubtedly it is an important part of the way ; yet a part only. Otherwise what becomes of obedience ? To neglect that would entail on us an enormous loss, all the more so because obedience takes the religious by the hand at his awakening and conducts him through the livelong day by the almost uninterrupted series of its prescriptions. Besides, whether the will of God is signified to us in advance, or manifested by the sequence of events, it has always the same rights, imposes always the same duties. We have not to choose between obedience and abandonment. These two should go together in the most intimate union.

This is the proper place to animadvert upon certain injudicious expressions. To say, for instance, that " God carries us in His arms " or that " we advance with giant strides " in the way of abandonment and, on the contrary, only advance " at a snail's pace " in the way of obedience : what is this but unjustly disparaging the one and overestimating the power of the other ?

If we look to its object only, obedience no doubt most frequently invites us to perform actions of little importance. But as these may amount to hundreds and thousands each day, the very multiplicity and continuity even of such short steps will surely bring us far on our road. Besides, constant fidelity in little things is far from being a little thing. Rather must it be considered a powerful means of dying to self and giving all to God. It is, let us boldly say the word, a hidden heroism.

Furthermore, why should not all these steps be great, and very great? For that, it is not necessary that the object of obedience be difficult or sublime; it suffices that the intention be pure and the dispositions holy. Our Blessed Lady performed actions the most ordinary in themselves, but she put her whole heart into them, and gave them thereby an incomparable value. Is not the same, within our due limits, possible to us?

Holy abandonment also is more frequently practised in little things than in great trials. Nor is it true to say that, by His will of good-pleasure, God carries us in His arms and makes us advance without any effort on our part. Ordinarily, at least, He requires our active co-operation, our personal exertions; and our progress shall be in proportion to our good will. It may be our misfortune, alas! to frustrate the action of God, by the intoxication of pride in prosperity or by insubordination in adversity. Then in truth we shall be able to make giant strides, but in a backward direction.

It remains, then, that we ought to respect the will of God howsoever manifested, practising at the same time obedience to His signified will and abandonment to His good-pleasure. Let us remember also that, generally speaking, by neither of His wills does it please Him to sanctify us without our own co-operation. To this result both His action and ours must contribute. And, as already remarked, our good will shall be the measure of our progress.

## CHAPTER IV

### ON CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOOD-PLEASURE

**I**N employing the word "obedience" to express the accomplishment of the signified will of God, and "conformity" to designate submission to the divine good-pleasure, we are following, it seems to us, the more general usage. It must be admitted, however, that writers are far from being in agreement on this point. St. Alphonsus in particular often makes use of the one term "conformity" in reference to both the signified will and the will of good-pleasure. The reader, therefore, must examine the context to ascertain the sense in which each author understands these expressions.

Just as all the other virtues, conformity to Divine Providence, or submission to the good-pleasure of God, contains numerous degrees of perfection, whether we consider the greater or lesser generosity in the adhesion of the will, or the greater or lesser nobility in the motives of this adhesion.

I.—If we take as our principle of gradation the *generosity wherewith we conform our wills to the will of God*, we shall have, according to Rodriguez, the following three degrees :

"First degree: so far from desiring or loving contrarieties or afflictions, we avoid them as much as possible; nevertheless we should be willing to endure them if they could not be avoided save by the commission of some fault. This is the lowest rung, the first step in conformity, the simple accomplishment of a rigorous duty. We may be saddened by the evils we suffer, we may groan and complain under the oppression of sickness, we may lament the death of relatives and friends, and still be resigned to the holy will of God.

"Second degree: In our hearts we do not wish for pains and sufferings, yet when they come we accept and

endure them willingly, because we know such afflictions enter into God's designs with regard to us. Here there is love of tribulation resulting from love of God, and this is what distinguishes the present degree from the preceding. When we have arrived at this point in resignation, we are ready to undergo the most bitter trials, not only with patience, but with a certain joy, as a sacrifice which we know to be pleasing to God. In the first degree we suffer patiently; in the second, we smile at affliction, and welcome it eagerly as a heaven-sent guest.

"Third degree: In this degree, which is the most perfect of all, we are not content with just accepting and suffering cheerfully, for the love of God, all the trials He may send us; but in the ardour of our love we long for these trials and rejoice at their advent, because we know they come from the hand of God and are ordained by His adorable will."<sup>1</sup> It was thus the Apostles "rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus" (*Acts* v, 41), and St. Paul "abounded with joy in all his tribulation" (*II Cor.* vii, 4).

May we venture the remark with respect to this gradation that the love whence comes the second degree may very well be the love of hope, and that the difference between this and the third degree could be more exactly defined?

However, the three-grade arrangement is generally received. Authors vary in matters of detail, but on the main point there is unanimity. Even in so early a writer as St. Bernard we find the same division, and it seems to us that none has been happier than he either in distinguishing the degrees or in assigning their respective motives. He commences by recalling the three classic ways of the beginner, the proficient and the perfect, and to each of them assigns its distinctive motive—fear, hope, or love. Then he adds: "The beginner, influenced by fear, *endures with patience* the Cross of Christ; the

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<sup>1</sup> *Pref. Chrét.*, 8<sup>e</sup> tr., c. xii.

proficient, animated by hope, *bears it willingly*; whilst he that is perfect in charity *embraces it with the ardour of love.*"<sup>2</sup>

II.—If we consider the *motive* of our conformity to the good-pleasure of God, it will be necessary to distinguish that which comes from pure charity and that which originates from some other supernatural source.

According to St. Bernard, beginners as a rule have only resignation derived from fear; proficient bear the cross with a willing heart, a more generous conformity begotten of hope; the perfect embrace the cross with ardour, which complete conformity is the fruit of holy love. It is easy to understand how fear suffices to produce simple resignation. But in order that submission may grow in generosity, that it may become even joyous, there is need of a more thorough detachment, a more lively faith, and a firmer confidence in God. Such joyous submission is not, however, *necessarily* the offspring of pure love, for the desire of eternal happiness would be quite competent to produce it. A soul enamoured of heaven will regard as the gifts of good fortune the little trials and even the grievous tribulations that befall her, penetrated as she will be with the alluring promises of the Apostle: "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us" (*Rom. viii, 18*), "for that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (*II Cor. iv, 7*).

There is finally the conformity inspired by pure love which in itself is the most perfect; for nothing can be so sublime, so delicate, so generous, so persevering as divine charity. Now, since all are commanded to love God supremely, it seems to follow that each of the faithful has the power to produce acts of this perfect conformity, at least from time to time. But we produce them better and with greater energy of the will in proportion as we grow in charity. And a day will come when, as we have

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<sup>2</sup> *I Serm. S. Andr.*

made pure love the dominant influence in our lives, so it shall be by pure love we shall conform ourselves to the dispositions of Providence, habitually at any rate. Yet just as the soul, no matter how advanced, can always make further progress in charity, in the same way she can perfect herself ever more and more in this conformity which is born of love.

And now, amongst all the degrees of conformity, where do we find holy abandonment? It occupies the summits. If we regard the generosity of submission, abandonment appears to have no place except in the highest degree. The first degree, that of simple resignation, certainly falls short of it; such submission may suffice for a life simply Christian, but not for the perfect life: it does not imply that complete detachment, that unreserved donation of the will which holy abandonment means. There is more generosity in the second degree. Nevertheless, it seems to us that the soul has not yet attained to the detachment required in order to make herself indifferent to everything and to deliver up her will absolutely into the hands of Providence.

Considered in its determining motive, abandonment is a conformity from love, exhibiting the particular shades which give it an accentuated character of filial confidence and total self-surrender. In short, as we shall see more clearly further on, it is the perfection of love and conformity.

We have no desire to depreciate simple resignation and the conformity which does not proceed from pure love. On the contrary, we should like to emphasise their importance and merit. But our present purpose is to treat explicitly of holy abandonment alone, and we shall begin by describing it, exactly and minutely, according to the teaching of St. Francis de Sales. We hope, however, that even souls less advanced in conformity will be able to follow our expositions with profit, and find much of what we shall have to say applicable, in due proportion, to their own particular state.



## CHAPTER V

### ON THE MEANING OF ABANDONMENT

**F**IRST of all, why do we use the word *abandonment* in the present connection?

Mgr. Gay has replied to this question in a luminous and well-known passage. "We are now speaking," he says, "of abandonment, and no longer of *obedience*. . . . Obedience is related to the cardinal virtue of *justice*, whereas abandonment has its roots in the theological virtue of *charity*. Neither do we speak of *resignation*, even though resignation naturally looks to the divine will, and only in order to submit to it. However, it surrenders to God but a *conquered* will, so to speak, a will, consequently, which is not submissive from the very first and so has to overcome itself before yielding. Abandonment goes much further. The term *acceptance* would be no less unsuitable. The human will, in *accepting* the will of God, seems to subordinate itself thereto only after the divine will has strictly established its rights. But such submission does not bring us to the goal we desire to reach. *Acquiescence* almost leads us thither. But is it not evident that this also implies something of an interior discussion, following which the will, at first inclined to resist, recovers its calm and surrenders? Then there is the word *conformity*, already employed to express our idea. It certainly seems very suitable; one might say it has been consecrated to this usage. Rodriguez has written an excellent treatise under this title, in his much-to-be-commended work on *Christian Perfection*. Still, conformity expresses rather a state than an act, and, moreover, the state it expresses seems to presuppose some sort of laborious adjustment. In pronouncing the word, we awaken the idea of a model which one looks at, admires, then endeavours to imitate.

And it is just the same where the conformity is realised without effort: the suggestion of something cold and studied is never absent. . . . Should we have done better by availing ourselves of the term *indifference*, which is also very exact and very much in use—it is the favourite expression of St. Ignatius in his Exercises? For it signifies the state of a soul that renders to God's will that unreserved homage of which we wish to speak. . . . But it is a word of negative meaning. Love makes use of it, but only as a stepping-stone; for there is nothing so positive as love. Therefore, the proper word here is abandonment.”<sup>1</sup>

No other term, indeed, describes so well the movement of trustful love whereby we throw ourselves into the arms of Providence as a child into the arms of its mother. True, this expression was for long put aside owing to the strange abuse which it suffered at the hands of the Quietists. But it has recovered its right to free circulation. Everybody nowadays employs it without scruple. So shall we, after first defining its meaning.

“To abandon one's soul and to forsake oneself,” says the pious Bishop of Geneva, “signifies nothing more or less than to deprive oneself of one's own will in order to give it up to God.” In this movement of love, which is the act of abandonment, we have to distinguish the point of departure and the final term; for the will must go out of itself that it may proceed to give itself wholly to God. Consequently, abandonment comprises two indispensable elements which we have to study, viz., holy indifference and the complete surrender of ourselves into the hands of Providence. The former is the necessary condition, the latter the constituent element.

I.—We shall treat first of holy indifference, without which abandonment would be impossible. There can be nothing so amiable as the will of God, considered in itself. Whether signified to us in advance, or manifested by the sequence of events, its unvarying purpose is to lead us to

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<sup>1</sup> *Vie et Vertus Chr.*, Abandon, ii.

everlasting life in the world to come, and to enrich us here with an increase of faith, love, and merit. It is God Himself Who comes to us as a Father and a Saviour, His heart overflowing with tenderness and His hands full of benefits. But however amiable it may be, the divine will encounters in us numerous obstacles. The divine law, our monastic rules, the inspirations of grace, the thorough-going practice of the virtues: all that which belongs to the signified will imposes on us a thousand daily sacrifices, whilst the divine good-pleasure will often add something unforeseen to the crosses known in advance. The greatest difficulty, however, comes from our native corruption, which leaves us exposed to the attacks of the triple concupiscence, full of pride and sensuality. Humiliations, privations, sufferings, even the most necessary, are repellent to us; pleasure, lawful or otherwise, glory, and the false goods of life fascinate us. The demon, the world, created objects, daily happenings: all these conspire to arouse in us such and such repugnances, such and such attractions. For many reasons we are often in danger of resisting the will of God, and even of failing to recognise it.

What shall open the eyes of our souls? What can deliver our wills from these trammels? Only Christian mortification under all its forms. We require it in good measure even to ensure our simple submission. And this explains why there are so many rebels against the divine will, so many critics, so many malcontents; and consequently so many unhappy souls, so few perfectly submissive and hence so few that are truly happy. But we require a still greater degree of mortification to render possible our progress to abandonment, as a habit at least. How can the will elevate itself to God so long as it is bound to earth by the strong cable of sin or by the thousand threads of little attachments? How can it resign itself into the hands of God, as an infant into its mother's arms, prepared to accept all His ordinances, even the most crucifying, before it has acquired the firmness which

comes from the spirit of sacrifice, before it has disciplined its passions, before it has become indifferent to all that is not God or His holy will? It must therefore train itself in the beginning, and as a rule by patient and long-continued efforts, to abstain and to endure, to resist the seduction of pleasure and the shrinking from pain; in a word, it must learn what the saints have called complete detachment or holy indifference.

The soul, therefore, requires at least indifference of judgment and of will. Then, penetrated with the conviction that God is all and the creature nothing, she will desire to see and embrace in all things only the God Whom she loves and yearns for, and His holy will which alone can conduct her to her end. Happy she, if she has also acquired what may be called indifference of taste, so that the world and its pleasures, the goods and honours of earth, everything, in short, that might estrange her from God, now inspires her with disgust, and, on the contrary, whatsoever brings her closer to Him, even suffering, delights her. So has it been with the saints who hungered and thirsted after God. Oh, how such indifference facilitates the practice of holy abandonment!

This indifference has nothing in common with morbid insensibility or with the apathy of the coward and the sluggard, and differs quite as much from the haughty disdain of the stoic who affected to regard pain as a word without meaning. Rather is it the unified energy of a will which, powerfully enlightened by reason and faith, entirely detached from all created things and complete master of itself, in the fulness of its liberty marshals all its forces in order to concentrate them on God and His holy will, and from this object allows itself to be turned aside by no creature, however captivating or repellent, so that it may keep itself ready for whatever may befall, prepared for action or inaction, only waiting until Providence has signified its good-pleasure.

A soul possessed of this holy indifference resembles a balance in equilibrium, always ready to lean to the side

of God's will; first matter, equally disposed to receive any kind of form; a clean sheet of paper whereon God may write what He pleases; a liquid, which has no shape of its own, but assumes that of the vessel containing it: pour it into six different vessels and it will assume six different shapes, conforming instantly to each vessel into which it is poured. Such a soul is pliant and flexible, "like a ball of wax in the hands of God, ready to receive with equal welcome all the impressions of His eternal good-pleasure"; or "like an infant that has not yet the power to will or love anything";<sup>2</sup> or, better still, like a beast of burthen. "A beast of burthen," says Saint-Jure, "never makes any choice or distinction in the service of its master, either with regard to time, place, person or load; it will serve you in the town, in the country, on the mountains, in the valleys; you can direct it to the right or to the left, and it will go whithersoever you desire; it is ready at all hours, morning or evening, day or night; it allows itself to be led by a child as easily as by a grown man; it is as content to be laden with manure as with cloth-of-gold, with sand as with diamonds or rubies."

By the very fact that the soul is thus disposed, "every ordinance of the divine will, no matter what its nature, finds her free and takes possession of her as of land without an owner. Everything appears to her equally good. To be made nothing of, or much, or little, to command or to obey this person or that; to be humbled or forgotten; to be in want or to have abundance; to enjoy long intervals of leisure or to be much occupied; to be alone or in company or in whatever company is chosen for her; to be able to see far ahead on her journey or only the length of a single step; to have consolation or aridity accompanied with temptation; to be strong or in delicate health and forced to languish for years; to be helpless and a burthen to the community whom she had purposed to serve; to live long or to die soon—within an hour: all is pleasing to her. She wills everything pre-

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<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Amour de Dieu*, I, ix, c. iv et xiii.

cisely because she wills nothing, and the reason why she wills nothing is that she wills everything.”<sup>3</sup>

II.—Holy indifference has now rendered possible to us the entire surrender of ourselves into the hands of God. And this loving, trustful, and filial self-surrender is the positive element in abandonment, its constituent principle. In order to determine exactly its import and compass, we have to consider two distinct psychological moments, according as the event is awaited or has already occurred. Before the event, whether foreseen or not, it consists, according to St. Francis de Sales, “in a simple and general attitude of expectation,” a filial disposition to accept whatever God may will, with the sweet tranquillity of a babe in its mother’s arms. Have we then the duty to employ a prudent forethought and the right to will and choose? That question will be answered in the chapters to follow. But, always in accordance with the same holy Doctor’s teaching, the *preferred attitude* of an indifferent soul to earthly objects, being absolutely mistrustful of her own lights and lovingly confident in God alone, “is to avoid amusing herself with the wishing and willing of things (the decision of which is reserved to God), and to allow the Lord to will and act for her as it best pleases Him.”<sup>4</sup>

After the event which has manifested the divine good-pleasure, “this simple expectant attitude is converted into consent or acquiescence.” “As soon as anything appears to her thus clarified and consecrated by the divine will, the soul flies to it with zeal and embraces it with passion. For love is the ground of her state, the secret of her apparent indifference. And it is just because her vital energy, withdrawn from all other objects, is wholly concentrated in divine love that it manifests itself there with such intensity. Hence every volition of God that touches her at all thrills to the very depths of her being this soul apparently so insensible. As a sleeping child

<sup>3</sup> Saint-Jure, *Conn. et Am. de N.-S.*, I, iii, c. viii.

<sup>4</sup> *Amour de Dieu*, I, ix, cc. xiv et xv.

which, every time its mother awakens it, extends to her its little arms, so does she smile at every divine ordinance and embraces it with the tenderness of love. Her docility is active, and her indifference has love for its cause. She is just a living *Yes* to God's holy will. Every sigh she heaves, every step she takes is an ardent *Amen* which unites and harmonises with the *Amen* of the blessed spirits above."<sup>5</sup>

St. Francis de Sales calls this abandonment the death of the will, in the sense that the will renounces its ordinary life in order to live altogether in the divine will, since it has neither the power nor the desire to will anything any longer, but abandons itself without reserve to Providence, so merging and losing itself in the divine good-pleasure that it can be seen no more.<sup>6</sup> Blessed death, through which one attains to a nobler life, "as the brightness of the stars disappears every morning in the greater brightness of the sun bringing back the day."<sup>7</sup>

According to the same holy Doctor, there are two degrees to be distinguished in the passage of our wills into the will of God. In the first degree the soul is still attentive to the course of events, but she blesses God for them. The author of the *Imitation* furnishes an example where he says: "Lord, provided that my will remains upright and established in Thee, dispose of me as Thou pleasest. . . . If Thou willest that I be in darkness, be Thou blest; if Thou wouldst rather have me in the light, be Thou again blest. If Thou condescendest to console me, be Thou blest; if it is Thy good-pleasure to afflict me, be Thou always equally blest." In the second degree the soul no longer pays attention to the happening of events, although sensible of them. She turns her heart away from them and "applies it to the divine sweetness and goodness, blessing the divine will, not now in its effects or in the events which it ordains, but in itself and its own excellence. And this is beyond doubt a much nobler exercise."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Mgr. Gay, *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *Amour de Dieu*, I, ix, c. xiii.

<sup>7</sup> *Esprit* de St. Fr. de Sales, p. xv, c. xvii.

<sup>8</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. xv et *lettre* 392.

In order to give us a better understanding and appreciation of holy indifference and the loving abandonment of our wills to the direction of God, the pious Bishop of Geneva proposes some very beautiful examples and delightful comparisons. Since we cannot conveniently cite them here, we refer our readers to the holy Doctor's text. As models of abandonment, he presents to us Mary Magdalen, the mother-in-law of St. Peter, Margarite of Provence (the consort of St. Louis). Who does not know the stories, so sweet and so ingenious, of the statue in its niche, of the deaf musician, and of the surgeon's daughter? One could read them twenty times over with as much pleasure as edification. The pious author shows a marked predilection for certain terms of comparison. Thus, he tells us, a servant in attendance on his sovereign never goes anywhere by his own will, but by the will of his master; a voyager, embarked in the ship of Divine Providence, allows himself to move with the motion of the vessel, and should have no other will than to let himself be borne according to the will of God; a little child, who has not yet the power to exercise its will, leaves to its mother the care of moving, of acting, and of willing in its behalf, just as it may seem good to her. Above all, look at the sweet Infant Jesus in the arms of the Blessed Virgin. See how this good Mother walks for Him and how she even wills for Him. He abandons to her the care of all that concerns Him, without enquiring whither she goes, or heeding whether she walks slowly or fast. All He wants is just to rest there within the arms of His sweet Mother.<sup>9</sup>

After thus describing abandonment according to its essence and nature, we now proceed to show in so many different chapters that it excludes neither prudence, nor prayer, nor desire, nor personal effort, nor sensibility to pain.

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<sup>9</sup> *Amour de Dieu*, I. ix passim.



## CHAPTER VI

### ON ABANDONMENT IN RELATION TO THE VIRTUE OF PRUDENCE

**N**O matter how perfect may be our confidence in God, no matter how absolute our self-surrender into the hands of His Providence for all that belongs to His good-pleasure, we shall never be dispensed from the obligation of following the prescriptions of prudence. The practice of this virtue, natural and supernatural, appertains to the signified will; it is the established law, always binding. God wills to help us, but only on condition that we do all that depends on ourselves, according to the proverb: God helps them that help themselves. To act otherwise would be to tempt God and to upset the order He has established. Our Lord exhorts each of us to have confidence, but in no one does He authorise improvidence or sloth. He does not oblige the lilies and the birds to spin or reap. But "having endowed us with intelligence, foresight and liberty, He wills that we should make use of them. . . . To abandon ourselves to God, without on our side doing what we can, is cowardice and indolence. There was nothing of this bad tendency about the piety of David. Whilst he awaited submissively whatever God should ordain regarding his kingdom and person, during Absolom's revolt, without losing a moment he issued the necessary orders to his troops, his counsellors, and his principal confidants, so as to secure his retreat and re-establish his authority. All this was according to the divine will." Thus spoke Bossuet to the Quietists of his time who, under the pretext of allowing God to act, put aside forethought and even moderate solicitude. And he added: "There—in the conduct of David—we have abandonment in the Christian sense of the word and according to the apostolic teaching. One can see that it

rests on two fundamental principles : the conviction that God has care of us and the conviction that we must none the less exercise our energies and vigilance, otherwise we should be tempting God.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, if there are events which escape our forethought and depend solely on the divine good-pleasure, such as public calamities in relation to our knowledge, and cases of sudden and violent assaults ; there are others in which prudence has an important part to play, whether to prevent unfortunate occurrences or to minimise the ill-consequences thereof. But from every sort of event it must derive spiritual profit. Let us content ourselves with citing a few examples. We should believe with full confidence that God will not permit us to be tempted beyond our strength, for He is faithful to His promises ; but it is on condition that “ he who thinketh himself to stand take heed lest he fall ” (I Cor. x, 12, 13), and that each of us should “ watch and pray that he enter not into temptation ” (Matt. xxvi, 41). Amidst the consolations and the aridities, the lights and the obscurities, the calms and the tempests, and the thousand vicissitudes that agitate the spiritual life, let us begin by getting rid of any negligence, dissipation, attachments, and other voluntary impediments to the action of grace that we may discover in ourselves ; let us endeavour to remain constant in the discharge of duty in spite of so many variations : then we shall have the right to abandon ourselves with love and confidence to the good-pleasure of God. The same applies to superiors. They experience alternations of failure and success. But whether the sky be all luminous or covered with clouds, they have the duty and feel the need of trusting themselves to the guidance of Providence. But “ the superior must not, under the pretext of having abandoned himself to God, and resting on His bosom, neglect to acquire all the knowledge demanded by the duties of his charge,”<sup>2</sup> or be remiss in the fulfilment of

<sup>1</sup> *Polit. tirée de l'Ecrit.*, I, vi, prop. xi.

<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. vi, et *Entret.*, ii.

these duties. Likewise, in what concerns temporalities, let our abandonment be as perfect as possible, one has to sow and reap, another must occupy himself in making clothes, a third in preparing food, and so on. With regard to health and sickness, the rule still holds. No person is permitted to endanger his life by indiscreet excesses. On the contrary, everyone is bound to take reasonable care of his health. And if it should please God to visit us with sickness, "He ordains by His signified will that we employ the remedies suitable to our complaint";<sup>3</sup> a secular must summon a physician and use the common and ordinary means for the restoration of his health, whilst a religious has to inform his superiors and do as they direct. It is thus the saints have always acted. And if occasionally they are seen forsaking the paths of ordinary prudence, it is only to follow a prudence of a superior kind.

Abandonment, therefore, does not dispense with prudence. But it forbids disquietude. Our Lord repeatedly condemns excessive solicitude in the matter of food, drink and clothing: how can our Father in heaven abandon His children on earth, He Who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field in raiment richer than Solomon's? Yet the lilies do not spin, and the birds neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. St. Peter also invites us to cast all our cares, all our anxieties upon the Lord because He hath care of us (I *Peter* v, 7). Before him the Psalmist had already said: "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall not suffer the just to waver for ever" (*Ps.* liv, 23).

St. Francis de Sales speaks to us in the same language on the subject of prudence united with abandonment. He would have us first accomplish the divine will as signified in our vows, our rules, and the orders of our superiors, because for us there is no better way, and also as declared in sickness, in consolations, in aridities, and other such contingencies. Briefly, he would wish us to

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<sup>3</sup> Idem, *Entret.*, ii.

take as much care of our perfection as is in accordance with God's will. This presupposed, he requires us to "give up all that superfluous and disquieting solicitude which we usually feel about ourselves and our perfection, and to attend simply to what we have to do, abandoning ourselves without reserve to the Divine Goodness in all that concerns temporal things, but much more in what belongs to our spiritual life and our perfection." For "that disquietude of the heart proceeds from the desires suggested by self-love, and from the inordinate tenderness we entertain for ourselves." <sup>4</sup>

This wise combination of prudence with abandonment is the constant teaching of the holy Doctor. It is true, he elsewhere encourages a very trustful soul "to embark upon the ocean of Divine Providence, without food, without oars, without sails, without any kind of necessities . . . without any solicitude concerning her own interests, whether temporal or spiritual. . . . Our Lord, to Whose care she has completely abandoned herself, will attend sufficiently to all these things in her behalf." <sup>5</sup> But the Saint is there speaking of the Flight into Egypt, that is, of those cases which it is impossible to foresee and provide for. In such circumstances one has only to commit everything with perfect trust to the guidance of Providence.

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<sup>4</sup> *Entret.*, iii.

<sup>5</sup> *Entret.*, xii.

## CHAPTER VII

### ON DESIRES AND PETITIONS IN THEIR RELATION TO ABANDONMENT

**W**E are not here speaking of instinctive attractions and repugnances, but of desires voluntarily conceived and prosecuted, desires which we translate into resolutions, petitions and efforts. Are these compatible with holy abandonment?

Of their compatibility with simple resignation nobody doubts. "Although the soul in resignation," says St. Francis de Sales, "prefers the will of God to all things, she still loves many objects besides the divine will." Citing the example of a sick person, he continues: "This person would rather live than die. But as it is God's good-pleasure that he should die, he submits with a good heart. Nevertheless, he would be better pleased to live."<sup>1</sup> Does the same hold for perfect indifference and holy abandonment? Would it be opposed to the perfection of abandonment to desire and pray that such a happy event might occur or continue, that such a trial, spiritual or temporal, might not befall or might come to an end? Speaking in a general way, and apart from exceptional cases, desires and prayers of this sort are permitted us, but *we are not obliged to them*.

We have the right to such desires and petitions, since Molinos was condemned for maintaining the following thesis:

"It is not expedient that he who is resigned to the will of God should petition Him for anything, because such petition is an imperfection, being an act of self-will and self-choice; it is to desire that the will of God should conform itself to ours. The words in the Gospel, 'Ask

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<sup>1</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, cc. iii et v.

and you shall receive,' were not addressed by Jesus Christ to interior souls who desire to have no will, nay, such souls are so far advanced that they have no longer even the power to ask anything of God."

"Be not afraid," says Balthazar Alvarez, "to desire and solicit health, if you are resolved to employ it purely for the glory of God. Far from giving Him offence, such a desire will please Him. I can prove it by citing His own testimony. 'So great is My love for souls,' He once said to St. Gertrude, 'that it constrains Me to hearken to the desires of the just as often as they are prompted by pure and humanly disinterested zeal. If it is truly in order to serve Me better that the sick desire restoration to health, let them ask it of Me with entire confidence. What is more: if they desire to get strong solely in order to merit a greater reward, I will still allow Myself to be swayed by their importunities, because I so love them as to consider their interests My own.'"<sup>2</sup>

St. Alphonsus has the same teaching. "Whenever our maladies are very afflicting, it is no fault to make them known to our friends, or even to ask the Lord to deliver us from them. But I speak only of very grievous sufferings." This doctrine he lays down also with regard to aridities and temptations, supporting himself on two memorable and universally known examples. The great Apostle, buffeted by Satan, did not think he was failing in perfect abandonment when he thrice besought the Lord to deliver him from the impure spirit. But after receiving the divine response: "My grace is sufficient for thee," St. Paul humbly accepted the necessity of continuing the fight; he put forth his best efforts and rejoiced in his infirmities, for in affliction he became strong with the strength of Christ. The second example cited by St. Alphonsus is still more august, and furnishes an unanswerable proof of his thesis: "Jesus Christ Himself, at the beginning of His dolorous Passion, revealed to

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<sup>2</sup> *Vie du P. Bal. Alvarez*, c. li.

His disciples the extreme affliction of His Soul, and as many as three times implored His Father to deliver Him therefrom. But Our Divine Saviour on the same occasion instructs us by His example as to what we ought to do after making such petitions, viz., to resign ourselves immediately to the will of God, and to say with Him : ' Nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt.' " <sup>3</sup>

There is no need of further remarks in order to make clear what is allowed us in similar circumstances. St. Francis de Sales, however, points to an exceptional case. " If the divine good-pleasure manifested itself to me before the occurrence of the event, just as the manner of his death was revealed to St. Peter, his chains and imprisonment to St. Paul, the destruction of his beloved Jerusalem to Jeremias, the death of his son to David : in that case I should be obliged to unite my will immediately to the will of God." <sup>4</sup> This supposes that the divine good-pleasure has been declared as absolute and irrevocable. Otherwise we should still retain the right to form desires and to make petitions.

But as a general rule we are not bound to use that right. For the events in question proceed from the good-pleasure of God. To Him, not to us, it belongs to make a decision. And when one has done all that prudence requires of him, why should he not be allowed to say to his Father in heaven : " Thou knowest how much I desire to love Thee ever more and more, and to advance in virtue. What is most expedient for me with a view to that end? Health or sickness? Consolations or aridities? Peace or war? Occupation or leisure? I am entirely in the dark, whereas Thou hast perfect knowledge. Thou permittest me to make known my preferences, but I would rather abandon myself to Thee Who art Wisdom and Goodness Itself. Dispose of me according to Thy good-pleasure. Only give me the grace to accept with a good heart whatsoever Thou shalt decide." It seems to us that

<sup>3</sup> *Conf.*, v, 3 et 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. vi.

no desire, no petition can express greater confidence in God than this attitude, or manifest more abnegation, obedience, and generosity on our part.

This is also the opinion of St. Alphonsus. He distinguishes three degrees in good intentions. "First degree: We may have in view the obtaining of temporal benefits, as, for example, when we get Mass said or fast in order to obtain deliverance from such or such a malady, such or such a slander, such or such an embarrassment. Such an intention is good, provided it is accompanied with resignation. But it is the least perfect of good intentions, because its object does not rise above the earth. Second degree: We may propose to ourselves to satisfy the divine justice or to obtain spiritual favours, such as virtues, merits, an increase of glory in heaven. This intention is much better than the preceding. Third degree: We may have no other intention than the good-pleasure of God and the accomplishment of His divine will, and then our intention has the third and highest degree of perfection and merit."<sup>5</sup> "When we are ill," writes the same author elsewhere, "the *better* course is to pray neither for health nor for sickness, but to abandon ourselves simply to the will of God, so that He may dispose of us according to His good-pleasure."<sup>6</sup>

Still more explicit is the doctrine of St. Francis de Sales. He tells us to take always the course most perfectly in accordance with the will of God and to entertain no other desires. "Although Our Saviour and the glorious St. John, His Precursor, possessed the free power of willing or not willing for themselves, they resigned to their mothers, in what concerned their external conduct, the care of deciding and doing all that was necessary for them." He exhorts us to make ourselves as pliable and plastic as wax to the divine good-pleasure, not wasting time with desires and volitions, but permitting God to will and act for us according as it shall please Him. Then

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<sup>5</sup> *Relig. sanct.*, xv, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Conf.*, v, 3.



he proposes as a model for us the daughter of a surgeon who said to her friend: “ ‘ I am indeed in great pain, yet I never think of using remedies, because, not knowing what would benefit me, I might neglect what is necessary and choose something useless or hurtful instead. Is it not much better to leave the care of all that to my father, who has all the knowledge, skill and good will requisite for my cure? I shall wait until he decides on what he judges most expedient, and occupy myself with just looking at him and assuring him of my filial love and perfect confidence.’ Does not this daughter manifest thus a deeper affection for her father than if she were anxiously soliciting him for the cure of her complaint and curious to see how he would open the vein and cause the blood to flow?” <sup>7</sup>

Who does not know the holy Doctor's celebrated maxim: “Desire nothing, ask nothing, refuse nothing”? He explicitly declares that it is not applicable to the practice of the virtues. But he would apply it, with particular insistence, to offices and employments in the community; also to sickness, consolations, afflictions, adversities; in a word, to all earthly things and to all the dispositions of Providence, “whether they regard the interior or the exterior. And he had an ardent desire to engrave this maxim on the minds of all, because he considered it extremely helpful.” <sup>8</sup>

The holy Doctor was asked whether one might not commendably desire a menial office from a motive of generosity. No, he replied, because of the danger to humility. “My daughters, there is nothing definitely wrong in this desire. Nevertheless, it is gravely suspect, and may possibly rest on a purely human motive. And how do you know if, after desiring these lowly charges, you will have the courage to accept the ignominy, the humiliation, and the bitterness which are found therein, and if you will have that courage always? We must therefore look

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<sup>7</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, cc. xiv et xv.

<sup>8</sup> *Entret.*, vi, passim.

upon the desire for occupation of whatever kind, whether mean or honourable, as a veritable temptation; for it is *always better* to have no desire, but to hold ourselves ready to do whatsoever obedience may demand of us.”<sup>9</sup>

To sum up: With regard to everything which comes from the good-pleasure of God, so long as His will does not manifest itself as absolute and irrevocable, we have the right to form desires and to make petitions; we are not, however, bound to use this right, and it is even more perfect to leave ourselves completely in the hands of Providence. There are cases, nevertheless, where it would be our duty to pray for the cessation of a trial; for instance, if our superior commanded us to do so. Should a person find himself failing in strength and courage, it will be enough to make a petition of this kind: “My God, vouchsafe either to lighten my burden or to increase my strength, either to remove the temptation or to impart to me the grace of resistance.”

With regard to the form of such petitions, we must pray in an absolute manner for spiritual goods which are indispensably necessary. Whatever is only a particular means amongst many others we should not ask, except under the condition that it is according to the divine good-pleasure. For a greater reason we ought to qualify thus our petitions for temporal favours. That which it is above all necessary to solicit is the grace to sanctify both prosperity and adversity, “seeking first the kingdom of God and His justice” in the assurance that all other necessities “shall be added” (*Matt.* vi, 33). To those who reverse this order and petition in the first place for the end of their trials, Father de la Columbiere addresses the following words, stamped with supernatural wisdom: “I greatly fear that it is to no purpose you pray and get others to pray for you. You should first have these Masses said and these fasts undertaken to obtain from God your thorough conversion, patience, contempt of the world and detachment from creatures. Then you might pray for

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<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, xxi et xxii.

the restoration of your health and success in your affairs, and God would hear your petitions with pleasure. Or rather He would anticipate them, needing only to know your desires in order to give them satisfaction.”<sup>10</sup>

This doctrine is conformed to the practice of holy souls. If occasionally they ask to be delivered from a trial, they yield more readily to the desire of suffering. They offer themselves to God in quality of victims when they hear only the voice of their generosity; but when humility speaks louder than the spirit of sacrifice, they ask nothing at all, surrendering themselves without reserve to the direction of Providence. Finally, the dominant and ruling influence in these souls is the love of God, with obedience and abandonment to His will in all its manifestations.

Although St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus for a long time invoked suffering and death as heralds of joy, and always loved them dearly, yet she ceased to desire them. She no longer desired anything but love. She felt attracted exclusively to “the way of spiritual childhood, the way of confidence and perfect abandonment. My Spouse,” she tells us, “gives me at each instant just what I am able to endure, nothing more. And if the next moment He increases my sufferings, He also increases my strength. Still, I could never think of asking Him for greater trials, for I am too little. I have no wish either to live or to die. If Our Lord were to offer me the choice, I would choose neither. I only will what He wills, that is what I have to love.”<sup>11</sup>

Another generous soul would not ask God to deliver her from her sufferings. She only asked the grace to avoid offending Him, to increase in His love, and to be more and more purified. “My God, is it Thy will that I should suffer? Then, I desire to suffer. Dost Thou will me to suffer much? I will that, too. Thou wiltest me to suffer without consolation? I will, therefore, to suffer without consolation. Every cross that Thou shalt

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<sup>10</sup> *Sermon sur la Prière.*

<sup>11</sup> *Histoire d'une âme*, cc. viii et xii.

choose for me shall be my choice also. But if Thou foreseest that I shall offend Thee in this state, oh, then I implore Thee to deliver me from it! If, on the other hand, I shall glorify Thee by suffering, leave me to suffer as long as Thou pleasest."

Gemma Galgani had an extraordinary thirst for sacrifice. Nevertheless, in the midst of a deluge of sufferings and persecutions, heroic as she was, she begged for a little respite. She even complained lovingly when oppressed with interior pains: "Tell me, my Mother, whither has Jesus gone? My God, I have no one but Thee, and Thou hast forsaken me!" Still she had the strength to say, with utter abandonment: "If it be Thy pleasure to torture me by the withdrawal of Thy sweet presence, I am content so long as I know that Thou art content." <sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Gemma Galgani*, éd. franc., cc. viii, xv, xix, xxvi.

## CHAPTER VIII

### EFFORTS PERMISSIBLE IN ABANDONMENT

**I**T would be a serious practical error to consider abandonment as a purely passive virtue, and to believe that the soul has simply to fall asleep in the arms of God Whose Providence bears her along. Such an opinion is directly opposed to the teaching of Pope Leo XIII: "There is not and cannot be a truly passive virtue." It also implies a wrong conception of the divine good-pleasure.

When a mother takes up her little child and places it where she wills, the child has reached its destination by merely permitting itself to be disposed of. Undoubtedly God could lift us up in this manner, raise us to whatever degree of virtue He wished, correct instantly faults heretofore incorrigible, preserve us entirely from certain temptations, etc. Sometimes, indeed, He has acted thus. These sudden elevations, these instantaneous transformations, are not beyond His power. Still, they form exceptions to the rule, because if they occurred too frequently they would interfere with His plan. The little child has to be carried, since it cannot walk. But as we have been endowed by God with the power of free choice, He will not sanctify us without our co-operation. He will so modify His action that our advancement shall be the fruit at once of His grace and our deliberate concurrence.

In the events which reveal to us His good-pleasure, God's intervention limits itself ordinarily to this: He takes us in His almighty hand, and without consulting us, often against our desire and anticipation, puts us in the position He has Himself chosen for us, whether it be a state of health or of sickness, consolation or interior

trial, peace or war, tranquillity or agitation, etc.: Sometimes we shall have prepared for ourselves this situation, whether good or bad. But most frequently it shall be arranged quite independently of us by God, Who disposes of us at His pleasure. And once placed in it, we must discharge, with the assistance of grace, the duties appertaining thereto. Now, these duties can be very complex.

To render abandonment possible, we have first to establish ourselves in holy indifference, and then to maintain ourselves in that state by the assiduous practice of Christian mortification. This is the labour of a lifetime.

Before the occurrence of an event, the soul puts herself into the hands of God, taking up an attitude of simple and general expectation. This, however, does not exclude prudence. And what need we have of prudence! For example, in the direction of a community or in the administration of an office, so as to avoid accidents and disappointments, and in the government of our souls in order to prevent faults, temptations, aridities! All this belongs to God's signified will, and must not be neglected under the pretext of abandonment. We cannot expect God to do that which He has ordained we should do for ourselves.

During the event, we must render ourselves submissive from the very first. In holy abandonment this submission takes the form of a trustful, filial, loving adhesion to the divine good-pleasure. Perhaps we shall require to make an effort to bring ourselves to this disposition and to maintain ourselves therein. But even though our submission should be as prompt and easy as it is full and affectionate, even though our wills simply acquiesce in the will of God, it is always an act or a voluntary disposition. In holy abandonment charity is first in operation, and this puts in action all the other virtues. Hence Bossuet describes abandonment as "a cluster or assemblage of acts of faith the most perfect, of hope the

most complete and confident, of love the purest and the most loyal.”<sup>1</sup> If whilst submitting ourselves antecedently to the final decision, we think it well to ask God, as we have the right to do, to remove this chalice from us, this also is an act or a series of acts.

After the event, we may have to fear serious consequences, spiritual or temporal, for ourselves or for others, as happens in the case of public calamities, persecutions, the ruin of our fortune, calumnies, etc. If it is in our power to prevent such consequences or to lessen them, we ought to do all that depends on us without awaiting the direct interposition of Providence. For God usually prefers to act through secondary causes; and perhaps it is precisely upon us He is counting in the present circumstances. Anyhow, in such emergencies we shall often find duties to discharge.

Moreover, after the event, we have to draw from such manifestations of the divine good-pleasure the fruit which God Himself expects from them, unto His greater glory and our spiritual good: acts of thanksgiving, confidence and love, if the event has been a happy one; penitence, patience, abnegation, humility, etc., if it has been a trial; and whatever its nature, growth in the life of grace, and consequently an increase of eternal glory.

But in the practice of abandonment the signified will of God loses none of its rights. Apart from exceptions and lawful dispensations, we must continue to observe it. The duties it imposes constitute the tissue of our lives, the foundation which abandonment adorns with the wealth and variety of its embroidered work. Besides, this loving and filial conformity does not even prevent us from taking the initiative in the practice of virtue. Our rules and Divine Providence furnish a thousand daily occasions for such practice. And why should we not ourselves make a thousand more, above all in our intimate occupations with God? We are not so rich in virtue as that we can afford to disdain this powerful means of mounting higher

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<sup>1</sup> *États d'or*, I, x, 18.

and higher. The remuneration we receive for the work enjoined, generous as it is, must not make us indifferent to the additional and magnificent rewards to be won by works of supererogation.

We are now very far from that purely passive state in which God is supposed to do everything, and the soul has only to receive. Further on it will be shown that this passivity is really found, in varying degrees, in the mystical states, where it is necessary to second the divine action and to put no obstacles in its way. But even in such states pure passivity is only a rare exception. Anyone who has the slightest comprehension of the economy of the divine plan, and even the most limited experience of souls, will have to admit that holy abandonment is not a state of inactive expectancy, or a forgetfulness of prudence, or slothful indolence. The soul retains in it all her activity with regard to what concerns the signified will of God; and as for the events coming from the divine good-pleasure, she foresees them so far as she can and does everything that depends upon her. But in the pains she takes she conforms herself to the will of God, she accommodates herself to the movements of grace, and acts in full dependence and submission with regard to Providence. It being for God, as Sovereign Master, to grant or refuse success to her undertakings, she lovingly accepts beforehand whatsoever He may decide, and thus she remains joyous and peaceful before and after the event. Away, then, with the indolent passivity of the Quietists, which disdains methodical efforts, cramps the spirit of initiative, and relaxes the holy energy of the soul!

The Quietists claim to find support for their tenets in the teaching of St. Francis de Sales. But entirely without reason. For that, it would be necessary to pick out words and phrases here and there in the writings of the holy Bishop, to isolate them from the context, and to alter their sense. We cannot cite all the passages where he teaches the opposite doctrine. But in one place he compares us to the Blessed Virgin going to the Temple, now in the arms



of her parents, now with her own little steps. "It is thus the Divine Goodness wills to conduct us on our way, but wills also that we should make our own little steps, that is, that we should do what we can with the assistance of grace."<sup>2</sup> As a child walks when its mother places it on the ground, and allows itself to be taken up again into her arms when she wishes, "in just the same way the soul that loves the divine good-pleasure permits herself to be carried and yet walks, too, by fulfilling with great solicitude all that appertains to God's signified will."<sup>3</sup> This saintly Bishop, so experienced in holy abandonment, wrote to one not less so, viz., St. Jane de Chantal: "Our Lady loves only places rendered deep by humility, contemptible by simplicity, widened by charity. She likes to be near the crib or at the foot of the cross. . . . Let us make our way by these low valleys of humble and little virtues. There we shall behold the charity which shines amongst the affections, the lilies of purity, the violets of mortification. I entertain a very particular love for these three little virtues, namely, gentleness of heart, poverty of spirit, and simplicity of life. . . . Our sole business in this world is to receive and carry our sweet Jesus, on our tongues by preaching Him, on our arms by the accomplishment of good works, on our shoulders by bearing His yoke, that is to say, the spiritual aridities and sterilities He sends us."<sup>4</sup> Is this language applicable to slothful passivity? Does it not rather describe spiritual activity of a high degree? "As for me," said St. Thérèse of the Infant Jesus, "I should like to have a lift whereby I could elevate myself to Jesus, because I am too little to climb up the rough ladder of perfection. Thy arms, O Jesus, are the lift that must bear me up into heaven." The Quietists should not regard this citation as favouring their views. It is simply an expression of love, of confidence, above all of humility. For the Saint does not by

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<sup>2</sup> I *Serm. Present.*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Entret.*, ii.

<sup>4</sup> *Histoire*, viii et ix; *Art. pour beatif.*, 27.

any means intend to remain in a state of indolent passivity until Our Lord comes to take her up in His arms and transport her to paradise. On the contrary, she exerts herself with great activity. "To attain perfection," she added, "I have no need to grow; on the contrary, I must remain little and become more and more little day by day." And, in fact, she acquired with the help of grace a humility which kept concealed from her the possession of all kinds of gifts, the obedience of a child, wonderful abandonment in the midst of great trials, the charity of an angel of peace, and above all an incomparable love of God, but a love which knew how to derive profit from everything, which, believing in its humility that it could do nothing great, "desired to turn to account every little sacrifice, every look, every word, to benefit by the least actions and to perform them from a motive of love, to suffer from love, and even at last to die of love."<sup>5</sup>

Is it necessary to add that all genuinely holy souls, far from waiting for God to carry them in His arms and to accomplish their duties in their behalf, rather show themselves ingenious in employing the means to increase their spiritual activity and to profit by every occurrence? The truth of this shines forth with particular evidence in the life of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity.

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<sup>5</sup> *Histoire d'une âme*, viii et ix; *Art. pour béatité*, 27.

## CHAPTER IX

### SUFFERING IN ABANDONMENT

**S**UFFERING, more or less, we shall necessarily encounter in simple resignation and even in perfect abandonment. Our organic faculties cannot but be affected by sensible evil. Our superior powers are subject to fatigue which they must feel whether they like it or not. Besides, we are in a fallen state, where we experience an attraction towards forbidden fruit, an aversion for disagreeable duties; and consequently all the agonies of interior strife. When God requires us to sacrifice some pleasure or to suffer some affliction for His love, despite the fact that the superior part of our souls submits courageously to the divine will, the inferior part must nevertheless feel the bitterness of the sacrifice. And this cannot fail to be of frequent occurrence. For God is all intent on purifying us, detaching us, and enriching us. He desires particularly to cure us of pride by means of humiliations, of sensuality by sufferings and privations; and since the maladies are stubborn the remedies must be applied frequently and for long.

It is true, we have the unction of grace and acquired virtue. The former soothes our pains, the latter serves to fortify our wills. St. Augustine had reason to say: "He that loves feels no pain; or if he does, he loves the pain."<sup>1</sup> Suffering can therefore exist in the sensitive part of our nature in spite of the holiest dispositions of the will. Sometimes, however, the abundance of spiritual consolations intoxicates us, the violence of love transports us, and all sense of suffering is lost in enjoyment. Sometimes also generosity, the proof of real love, withdraws to the very apex of the will, joy and peace vanish from

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<sup>1</sup> *De bono vid.*, c. xxi

our hearts, whilst fear, weariness and disgust invade our souls and render them sad even unto death. Occasionally it will happen that after supporting the bitterest trials with admirable serenity, we suddenly become agitated about a trifle: the cup being already full, a single drop added sufficed to make it overflow. Or rather say that God, desiring to keep us humble after such glorious victories, makes our weakness betray itself in an insignificant skirmish. Whatever about this, filial acquiescence is the fruit of virtue, not of insensibility. A permanent paradise is impossible here below, even for the saints.

Hence the pious Bishop of Geneva said to his religious daughters: "Let us not be concerned about what we feel or do not feel. Nor must we imagine that in these states of indifference and abandonment we shall never have desires contrary to the will of God, or that our nature will not feel a repugnance to the events ordained by His good-pleasure, for such involuntary sentiments shall often occur. The virtues dwell in the superior part of the soul. The inferior part commonly remains outside their influence. We must make no account of this; but without paying any heed to its desires and in spite of its remonstrances, let us embrace the will of God and unite ourselves thereto." Moreover, the holy Doctor always regarded "as a chimera the imaginary insensibility of those who will not allow us to be human. But having paid due tribute to this inferior part of our nature, we must discharge the duty we owe the superior part where sits, as a king on his throne, the spirit of faith, which has to console us in our afflictions and even through our afflictions."<sup>2</sup>

It was in this way he acted himself. "I am now going to make that desirable visitation," he writes, "where at every turn I behold crosses of all kinds. *My flesh is terrified at the prospect, but my heart adores them.* . . . Yes, I salute you, ye crosses great and small, I kiss your feet, unworthy as I am to stand beneath your shadow."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Entret.*, ii, fin., et *Lettre* 448.

<sup>3</sup> *Lettre* 399.

At the death of his mother and his young sister, he experienced "cruel pain at these partings, but though so poignant, his grief was yet tranquil. The good-pleasure of God is always holy and His ordinances always worthy of love."<sup>4</sup> So he was determined to take the part of Providence in every occurrence. But if he won glorious victories in his great trials, he once felt himself somewhat disquieted over a matter of no importance, so much so, indeed, that it robbed him of two hours of his rest. He laughed at himself for such weakness, and saw clearly enough that it was the agitation of a child. But how to escape from it, he did not know. "God thus willed to show me that if I can withstand great assaults, this is not due to any strength of mine, but to the grace of my Saviour."<sup>5</sup>

St. Jane de Chantal was remarkable for her strength of soul and for her abandonment. She required, nevertheless, to be constantly encouraged by her holy director (St. Francis de Sales), and to be comforted by him in her interior pains. Whenever any of her loved ones died, she grieved with extraordinary violence. Although she had the courage to remain to the last by the deathbed of her eldest daughter, assisting her with holy ministrations, yet when the end came she collapsed in a fainting-fit, and, being revived, passed many hours in a comatose condition. At the death of St. Francis de Sales she wept without ceasing until the following day. But "if she knew that her tears were displeasing to God, not a single one would she have shed." In fact, "she did herself so much violence to arrest their course that she fell ill and was obliged by holy obedience to let them flow afresh." "What a heavy blow it has been," she exclaimed, "but how gentle and paternal the hand that dealt it! I kiss that divine hand and cherish it with all my soul, bowing my head and heart beneath God's holy will, which I adore and revere with all my strength."<sup>6</sup>

We could cite a multitude of examples to the same

<sup>4</sup> *Lettre* 432 et 458.

<sup>5</sup> *Lettre* 431.

<sup>6</sup> Mgr. Bougaud, *Hist. de Ste. Chantal*, cc. iii, xii, xix, xxi, xxii.

effect, but let us leave the servants and go to the Master. At the moment of His entrance into this world Our Saviour offers Himself to His Father to be the universal Victim. His whole life is to be a cross and a martyrdom. He sheds just enough tears to prove the tenderness of His Heart, manifests just enough anger to inspire the guilty with salutary fear. Otherwise He preserves a wonderful serenity, even longing for that baptism of blood wherewith He will cleanse the world. Now His hour is come. Restricting the joys of the Beatific Vision to the topmost region of His Soul, He voluntarily delivers up each of His faculties and His entire Body to the most terrible agony. By His own free choice He abandons Himself to fear, weariness, disgust; and His Soul is sorrowful even unto death. He beholds our accumulated sins, the rights of His Father criminally ignored, immortal souls heading for the abyss, the torments and ingratitude that await Him; and the sight plunges Him in an ocean of bitterness. Three times He appeals to the mercy of His Father: "If it be possible let this chalice pass from Me," and He is pleased that an angel comes from heaven to console Him. A sweat of blood inundates Him, but on that account He prays the longer: "My Father, not My will but Thine be done."

In presence of this most awful spectacle the man of weak faith is troubled; he cannot comprehend it. But the truly faithful soul adores, admires, and returns thanks. Could Our Lord in truth have done anything more profitable for us, in quality of Saviour, Consoler, and Master, than by enduring this agony? As our Saviour, it was fitting that He should take upon Him all our infirmities and even our deepest humiliations, with the sole exception of sin. Now, could there have been for God Almighty any humiliation comparable to this manifestation of weakness? Therefore He chose it with the most perfect content.

As our Consoler, it was fitting that He should know all our sorrows. Had He shown Himself inaccessible to

fear, to repugnances, to feelings of disgust, how should we dare expose our miseries to Him? But He voluntarily stooped to our level, just as a good father makes himself a child with his children. His humble condescension comforts us, encourages us, and applies soothing balm to the wounds of our souls. At the same time, the excess of His sorrows and of His voluntary abasements overwhelms the generous Christian and arouses in him the desire and, so to speak, the need to repay suffering with suffering to this Best of friends. "One night," says Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, "my pains being very severe, I felt nature beginning to assert itself. . . . Contemplating Jesus in His agony, I offered Him my affliction to console Him, and immediately I became conscious of an increase of fortitude. So I have always acted. In every trial, whether great or small, I consider what Jesus had to endure of a similar nature, in order to lose my pain in His more grievous pain and myself in Him." <sup>7</sup> St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus speaks thus in her turn: "When the Divine Saviour asks for the sacrifice of everything we hold dear in the world, it is quite impossible, without a very particular grace, to refrain from crying out with Him in the garden of His agony: 'My Father, let this chalice pass from me.' But we must also hasten to add with Him: 'Let not my will but Thine be done.' It is very consoling to think that Jesus, the mighty God, has known all our weaknesses, and that He trembled at the sight of His bitter chalice, the chalice which at other times He so eagerly longed for." <sup>8</sup> There have been and yet shall be times of trouble for each of us; let us resolve for the future to imitate the generosity of the Saviour. "My Father," we may cry, "deliver me from this hour of trial," but then, overcoming immediately this momentary panic, let us add: "But for this cause I came unto this hour" (John xii, 27).

<sup>7</sup> Sr. Élis. de la Trinité, *Souvenirs*, c. xvii.

<sup>8</sup> *Histoire*, 1<sup>re</sup> lett. aux 2 miss.

As our Master, Our Lord teaches us in His agony three precious truths. First, that it is not a fault or even an imperfection to experience the sense of suffering, fear, weariness, repugnance and disgust, provided we never cease repeating with a resolute will: "Not my will but Thine be done." Our Lord is not less perfect or less great in the Garden of Gethsemani than on Mount Thabor or at the Father's right hand. To think otherwise would be blasphemy. And it is no small thing that a soul, deprived of all sensible support and surrounded with troubles and contradictions, should still remain constantly faithful to the will of God.

He teaches us, secondly, that it is no fault or even an imperfection to complain to God with loving submission, just as a hurt child runs to tell its mother of the pain it suffers and to show her the wound. "Love allows us to complain, yea, to repeat all the lamentations of Job and Jeremias, provided we preserve a holy submission at the bottom of our hearts, in the superior part of our souls."<sup>9</sup> So speaks the gentle Saint of Geneva. But elsewhere he reproves those who are never done complaining, and who apparently cannot find enough persons to make the confidants of their trials. St. Alphonsus holds the same language: "It is more perfect, undoubtedly, not to complain of the sufferings we experience in sickness; nevertheless, when our pains are very grievous it is no fault to make them known to our friends, or even to ask Our Lord to deliver us therefrom. Observe, I am speaking now of great sufferings. For there are persons who do very wrong by complaining whenever they feel any pain or the slightest inconvenience."<sup>10</sup> These holy Doctors, then, admit as lawful moderate and submissive complaints and only reprove such as are excessive.

The Divine Master teaches us, thirdly, that it is no fault or even an imperfection, to ask God *in great trials* to remove this chalice from us, if it is possible, and even

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<sup>9</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, i, ix, c. iii.

<sup>10</sup> *Conf.*, v, 3.



to ask it with a certain insistence, after Our Saviour's example. But "after entreating the Father to console you, if it is not His pleasure to do so, muster up all your courage to accomplish the work of your salvation on the cross, as if you were never to descend from it. Contemplate our good Master in the Garden of Olives. Having implored consolation of His Father, and knowing that it was not the Divine Will to grant it, He thinks no more of it, desires it no more, petitions for it no more, but, as if He had never asked it, applies Himself valiantly to the work of our redemption." <sup>11</sup> This is the instruction which St. Francis de Sales gave to St. Jane de Chantal.

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<sup>11</sup> *Lettre*, 392.

## CHAPTER X

### ABANDONMENT AND SELF-OBLATION

**B**EFORE comparing these two things, we must briefly recall what has been said about the idea of abandonment. It is a conformity to the divine good-pleasure, but a conformity originating in love and carried to a high degree of perfection. Not by insensibility but by virtue is the soul established in a holy indifference with regard to whatever is not God or His adorable will. Before the event which shall make known to her the divine good-pleasure, she holds herself in an attitude of "simple and general expectation," whilst faithfully accomplishing the signified will of God. She proceeds with prudence in all matters where the decision belongs to her. As for those of which she has not control, but which come from the divine good-pleasure, although she has the right to desires and petitions respecting them, she prefers, as a general rule, to leave the disposal of them entirely to her Father in heaven, so great is her confidence in Him, so great her solicitude to do nothing opposed to the divine good-pleasure. Scarcely has this been manifested to her by the event, before she lovingly acquiesces. Yet she is not merely an inert machine that may be moved without resistance. Far from it. She employs all her intelligence and will-power to adjust and conform herself to the good-pleasure of God and to derive therefrom the greatest spiritual profit. But her love and the sincerity of her abandonment do not prevent her from feeling the smart of suffering. It does not disturb her peace, however. All she desires is to fulfil the will of God as perfectly as possible. Such is the nature of holy abandonment, as we have described it, following the teaching of St. Francis de Sales. We might express it all

in the following words: "My God. I want nothing in the world but Thee and Thy holy will. I have the most ardent desire to increase in Thy love and all the virtues, and therefore I am determined to accomplish faithfully Thy signified will. But with regard to everything that depends not on me, but altogether on Thee, I put myself confidently into Thy hands, and I hold myself in a state of simple and filial expectation, ready to do whatsoever Thou shalt ordain. I desire nothing, I ask nothing, I refuse nothing. Suffering has no terrors for me, because Thou wilt always proportion it to my weakness. All I wish is to let Thee conduct me according as Thou thinkest well, and to submit with love to Thy good-pleasure."

It is evident that abandonment, thus understood, involves nothing perilous or presumptuous. It is only a filial submission, full of confidence and love, and may be recommended as an ideal to all souls advanced in virtue.

To people of the present time, enamoured as they are of activity and self-sacrifice, this attitude of simply waiting on the divine good-pleasure may appear too passive. There is always this tendency to go too far in abandonment. Instead of permitting God to dispose of everything as He pleases, instead of waiting in tranquillity until He decides according to His good-pleasure, souls are forward to anticipate Him, to offer themselves, to consecrate themselves, to devote themselves. Some are unwilling to understand holy abandonment except as including this eagerness for sacrifice. But such a self-immolating disposition requires to be closely examined. Does the soul desire simply to testify to God, without actually praying for sufferings, that assisted by His grace she is ready with a good heart to do or suffer whatsoever He may ordain? That scarcely differs from abandonment, as we have above described it, and, with an exhortation to humility, might be recommended to all advanced souls. But what if this soul means to say to God: "Have no fear, Lord, about sending me sufferings, for I desire them, I almost demand them, and Thou wilt gratify my secret

wishes by letting me have them." Such an attitude, if it does not actually amount to the oblation of oneself as victim, comes very close to it. At all events, it is not abandonment in the sense approved by St. Francis de Sales. And it can be permitted only with caution, that is, not to everybody without distinction, but only to souls sufficiently proved, as we shall explain when we come to the subject of victims. As for those who are more self-confident than solidly grounded in virtue, we should make them understand that, before elevating their desires to such a height, they must first devote their attention to the accomplishment of God's signified will and the sanctification of their daily crosses. St. Peter offered himself to suffer and even to die with his adorable Master. His love and sincerity were beyond all doubt. But he was not on that account the less presumptuous, as the result only too clearly proved.<sup>1</sup>

There is further to be considered the oblation of oneself for sacrifice, the vow to become a victim. But as we do not intend to give here the doctrinal and practical exposition of this exceedingly delicate and complex question, we shall say no more than is necessary to indicate precisely where the way of abandonment ceases and a different way begins. Readers desirous to make a thorough study of the subject can consult the authors who professedly treat of it, particularly M. Ch. Suavé, in his excellent dissertation (perhaps a little too severe in its restrictions) on the idea, state, and vow of a victim.<sup>2</sup>

The oblation can be made with different intentions and under a variety of forms. Blessed Gemma Galgani and Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity offered themselves as victims for sinners, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus as a

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<sup>1</sup> Authors who take this view of abandonment support their opinion on the *Acte d'Abandon à Dieu*, found amongst the works of Bossuet. It seems to us that the abandonment recommended in this treatise is not quite identical with that of the *États d'Oraison*. At any rate it is not the abandonment described by St. Francis of Sales: it is rather an oblation, and an oblation very much emphasised.

<sup>2</sup> *Introduc. doctrinale à la Vie abrégée de Mère Véronique du Cœur de Jésus.*

holocaustal victim to compassionate Love; others have offered themselves to the justice, the sanctity, or the love of God. Most frequently, however, souls consecrate themselves as victims of expiation to the divine justice or sanctity, in order to repair the injury done God's glory, to deliver sufferers from purgatory, to draw down the mercy of God upon holy Church, upon one's country, upon the priesthood and religious orders, upon a single family, or even a single individual.

The foundation of this practice lies in the communion of saints, especially in the transferability of the satisfactions of the just to the account of sinners. It therefore belongs to the mystery of redemption by suffering. Having chosen this way to save the world, Our Lord chose it also to secure to us what He bought for us at the price of His Precious Blood. In His infinite goodness, He has condescended to associate elect souls with Himself in the work of salvation; and not being able to suffer any longer in His glorified Humanity, has assumed, so to speak, additional humanities in order by this means to continue saving souls through suffering.

In the course of the centuries, especially in troubled times, victims have not been lacking. Our unhappy age, over which impiety has spread itself like a plague of darkness whilst immorality with its deluge of filth inundates everything, has seen them multiply beyond count, and even whole institutes and communities consecrating themselves as victims. If we may credit private revelations, Our Lord has need now of victims, and generous victims. He looks for souls who by their sufferings and tribulations shall make expiation for sinners and ingrates. "He is full of pain because He cannot find enough souls who are willing to follow Him generously in the way of suffering."<sup>3</sup> These revelations are assuredly worthy of respect; besides, they are in themselves very credible. But we have a far surer and more unquestionable guarantee in the word of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Pius IX

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<sup>3</sup> Elis. de la Trin. *Souv.*, xii.

asked the superior-general of a religious Order to invite magnanimous souls to offer themselves to God as victims of expiation. In his Encyclical addressed to the French people in 1884, Leo XIII exhorts "those especially who live in monasteries to offer themselves to appease God's anger by humble prayer, voluntary penance, and self-oblation." Pius X has highly commended the "Sacerdotal Association," being happy to hear that "many of its members offer themselves secretly to God to be immolated as expiatory victims, particularly for consecrated souls, in these unhappy times when expiation is so necessary"; and he has enriched with numerous indulgences "this great work of Christian piety." For it is in truth a very sublime method of practising the love of God and the love of our neighbour.

But the same Pontiff speaks of it as "an exceedingly great undertaking and a very arduous way." God forbid that we should try to discourage generous souls when the Sovereign Pastor invites them! No, we only desire to prevent indiscretion. Those who have made profession in a community of victims have little cause to fear imprudence or self-deception. The rule determines exactly the extent of their offering, and they have tested their strength during the noviciate. But when a soul outside religion, with or without a vow, offers herself unreservedly, one can never tell in advance how far God will use the rights she has given Him. Undoubtedly, if she has only presented herself in response to a particular vocation duly authenticated, God Who has called her will give her all the graces she may require. So it was with that religieuse who, eight days before her death, after long and terrible sufferings, could say that "she had no regrets for having offered herself." St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus said likewise on the very day of her exit: "I do not repent of having made myself the victim of Love." Will this be the case with a soul that has engaged herself lightly, and without having sufficiently prayed, reflected, consulted, tried

herself? Will Our Lord give her the special graces required, as the reward of her temerity? It is to be feared that the more eager she has been to engage herself, the more persistent shall she afterwards be in wearying with her complaints and discouragements not alone her unfortunate director, but all who have to do with her. The proper place for a victim is on Calvary with Jesus, and not in the delights of love. Souls who would really offer Jesus consolation and reparation must be victims with the great Victim of Golgotha.

"It is important to understand this. For the presumptuous readiness of many to offer themselves as victims to God gives the impression that they have no idea how far He is wont to go in matters so serious. God has a number of rights over us which, however, He does not exercise until He has obtained our free consent. Happy, a thousand times happy, they who offer themselves to Him unreservedly! But let them look out for great hardships, and extraordinary sacrifices." <sup>4</sup> Every page in the lives of victim-souls justifies this remark.

We are now in a position to understand the points of difference between self-oblation and abandonment.

I.—The soul in simple abandonment never anticipates. With regard to everything that depends on Providence and not on herself, she abides in a holy indifference, awaiting the good-pleasure of God. She is like an infant that with love and docility allows itself to be managed. The victim-soul, on the contrary, does take the initiative. By the very fact of her oblation she implicitly prays for suffering; she provokes God to send it; sometimes she even expressly solicits it.

II.—In abandonment there is no room for either pride or temerity or illusion. Prudence and humility have complete control. For God is permitted to regulate everything, and we reserve to ourselves only the right to obey Him. Abandonment is, in fact, just the simple accomplishment of the divine will. Apart from a special

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<sup>4</sup> Mgr. Gay, *Vie et Vert. chr.*, Abandon.

divine call, does self-oblation appear equally humble, equally free from illusion and presumption? Does it allow God the liberty to dispose of us at His pleasure?

III.—The soul abandoned to the divine action can always count upon the assistance of grace. But, always excepting a divine vocation, can the soul that takes the initiative and runs ahead of God be equally sure of having Him with her?

Souls advanced in spirituality appear to be drawn towards holy abandonment as if by instinct. All can be recommended to practise it *in the spirit of victims*. The same applies to our daily practices of obedience and voluntary mortification. This intention adds nothing to our obligations, whilst it puts into all our actions a new energy of pure love which increases their merit and efficacy. On the other hand, prudence and humility forbid us to offer ourselves as victims, above all to ask for sufferings, without a divine and duly verified vocation. Even with such a call, we should wait until we have proved our strength by patiently supporting our daily trials and practising voluntary mortification. If we take the initiative by asking for this or that kind of suffering, we are thereby assuming responsibility for the disposal of things, and here as elsewhere should follow the prescriptions of prudence. Now, prudence would have us except those trials which might prove dangerous to ourselves, and charity those which might be a cause of annoyance to others. There is manifestly no need to make these reservations when we leave the choice of our sufferings to God. For the disposition of affairs belongs no longer to us but to Him; and we can entrust ourselves with confidence to His paternal wisdom.

Moreover, apart from a divine call, what is the good of asking for suffering? Has a soul that aspires to the loftiest heights of virtue the need to seek anything beyond obedience and perfect abandonment? Her vows, her rules, the dispositions of Providence: here is the sure way which leads to perfection without illusion or disappoint-



ment. Therein one always finds wonderful helps for the acquisition of purity of soul, the perfection of virtue and intimate union with God by love. This progressive transformation by means of our religious observances is in itself a formidable task and one capable of occupying the whole of a long life. But if that does not suffice for our generosity, the rule, supposing the necessary permission, authorises us to undertake more than it commands. Thus it gives the spirit of sacrifice a scope almost limitless, as vast as our desires can possibly be. With regard to holy abandonment, every interior soul finds a thousand opportunities for practising it. Subjects will often have need of it in community life, superiors oftener still in the administration of their office. We must always begin by welcoming the crosses God has chosen for us. If they are not sufficient to satisfy the ardour of our desire for suffering, He will know, without our telling Him, how to increase their number or their weight.

In this way, then, souls that desire to live in the spirit of victims have no need, generally speaking, to pray for suffering. They will find it in abundance in the interior life, in their daily duties, in voluntary mortifications, and in the dispositions of Divine Providence. This modest way has not, indeed, the splendour that glorifies self-oblation, but still it offers ample scope for the spirit of sacrifice, and is perhaps a safer way for prudence and humility. But be it well understood that, when the Holy Spirit inspires a soul to offer herself as a victim, provided she acts with the permission and under the control of God's representatives and continues, above all, zealously attentive to her daily duties, no one can reproach her with temerity or self-deception, since she is following a divine call. She must, indeed, expect terrible trials. But she shall have the merit of them, and God will be with her,

## SECOND PART

# THE FOUNDATION OF HOLY ABANDONMENT

**H**OLY ABANDONMENT has its foundation in charity. There is no longer question of an inferior degree of conformity to the divine will, such as is found in simple resignation, but of a loving, confident, filial self-surrender, of the complete merging of our wills in the will of God. Now, it is the property of love to unite wills in such a close union. This degree of conformity is itself a very sublime exercise of pure love, and ordinarily can only be found in advanced souls in whose lives pure love has the dominant influence. But since it requires a complete detachment, and since charity is obliged here to make a very special appeal to faith and confidence in Providence, we shall first treat of detachment, faith, and confidence; and then of love which is the formal elicitive principle of holy abandonment.

## CHAPTER I

### ON DETACHMENT

**T**HE prerequisite condition for perfect conformity is perfect detachment. For if our wills have strong attachments, if they are bound and riveted to earthly objects, when we want to unite them to the will of God we shall meet with violent opposition. Even when the attachment is slight, resistance must be experienced. There shall be inevitable struggles and strain, and we shall be very far from prompt and easy conformity, very far especially from perfect abandonment, and that for two reasons. First, because holy abandonment is a complete union, a sort of identification of our wills with the divine, so that we are ready beforehand for whatever God may ordain, and lovingly welcome all that He does. Before the event it is a peaceful and confident expectation; after the event it is a filial and affectionate submission. From this we can see what thorough detachment it presupposes. Second, because such detachment must be as universal as it is thorough. Is it God's will that we should be rich or poor, ill or well, enjoying consolations or enduring trials, honoured or despised, loved or hated? Since He is our Sovereign Master, He has the right to dispose of us as He pleases. According to His pleasure, He can make us suffer in our external goods, in the goods of the body or of the mind, or in our reputation, just as He thinks proper and without consulting us. And as a rule He strikes without warning. Our wills, therefore, in order to hold themselves in readiness to welcome with love all the divine ordinances, must be detached from created goods of every kind: from riches, from relatives and friends, from health, from ease, from comfort, from their own prejudices, from science, from consolations, from esteem and affection. With regard to all these and

such-like things they require to be completely indifferent, seeking only God and His all-holy will. Then, no matter how unexpectedly the divine good-pleasure may manifest itself, no matter under what form, we shall always embrace it with courage and ease.

All who desire to reach holy abandonment must hold in high esteem Christian mortification, by whatever name it may be called, whether abnegation or renunciation, the spirit of sacrifice, or the love of the cross. They will have to practise it to the best of their power, and with untiring perseverance, in order to attain thereby to perfect abandonment and to maintain themselves constantly therein. Father Roothaan had good reason to say: "It would be useless without mortification to endeavour to reach indifference, because it is by means of mortification alone, or chiefly, that we can make ourselves and prove ourselves indifferent."<sup>1</sup> And Father Le Gaudier remarks with equally good reason: "It is no easy thing to add to the observance of the commandments the voluntary contempt of riches and external goods. It is much more difficult to add to these the contempt of honour and reputation, and more difficult still to despise one's own life, one's own body, one's own will. But the greatest difficulty of all is to subordinate to the will and glory of God our natural gifts, our consolations, spiritual attractions, virtues, grace, in fine, and even glory."<sup>2</sup> Hence it is clear that the way to abandonment is a long way and very arduous. And we have here the reason why so few mount to such a height of conformity, why the majority rest content with lower degrees, or even with simple resignation. They all indeed would be happy to attain to perfect abandonment, but are unwilling to pay the price. God only asks us to empty our vessels that He may fill them with His gifts. Unfortunately, because the effort costs something, we fail to empty them thoroughly. And here applies the beautiful expression of Thauler which

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<sup>1</sup> *Exer. spir. de S. Ign., med. fond., iv.*

<sup>2</sup> *De perf. vitæ spir., P.I, S. I, c. xiv.*

savours so strongly of St. Francis de Sales: "When asked where he found God, 'there,' he replied, 'where I lost myself, and where I found myself I lost God.'"<sup>3</sup>

But amongst all the different forms of renunciation we should like to emphasise two which are particularly difficult and particularly indispensable, viz., obedience and humility. Who doubts that inordinate self-love and attachment to our own wills are the last refuge of hard-pressed nature, and the greatest obstacle to progress in perfection and peace of soul? When we have sacrificed everything else, the external goods of fortune and those of the body, we remain too often entangled in the double cord of pride and self-will. Therefore, in order to complete our emancipation we must appeal to obedience and humility, two sister-virtues which cannot exist apart. Happy the soul that endeavours with persevering zeal to detach herself from her own will, to obey in all things and always, to practise patience in hardships, contradictions, and humiliations, turning a deaf ear the while to the protests of nature! Still happier she that is content to live in utter abjection and extreme necessity, regarding herself even after the fulfilment of the work enjoined her as a wicked and unworthy servant, and goes so far as to call herself and consider herself sincerely in her innermost heart the least and vilest of all!<sup>4</sup>

The soul firmly grounded in obedience and humility will escape thereby many a rude shock coming from the lack of virtue. Nevertheless, she will have to endure many afflictions. Nor, assuredly, will she be insensible to their bitterness; but she is prepared to welcome them, and her humility disposes and inclines her to perfect abandonment. With the poignant thought of her past sins ever present to her memory, as happens in the case of all pure and humble souls, she renders homage to the infinite justice which exacts what is due to it, and she accepts with gratitude the punishment of her faults.

<sup>4</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Esprit*, iii, 50.

<sup>5</sup> *St. Benedict's Rule*, vii.

Whenever any fresh trial befalls her, she says : " I must suffer this in expiation. Thanks, O my God, for chastising me less than I deserve." And were she not afraid of her weakness, she would willingly add : " More suffering, Lord, send me still more, so that I may satisfy Thy justice." Or at least, considering the evil inclinations that still dwell in her, and how little is required to disturb her peace, she realises the pressing need she has of sufferings and humiliations, and welcomes, as a piece of good fortune, every occasion of dying to herself. Sometimes, forgetting her own pain and thinking only of the outrages committed against God, she exclaims with Gemma Galgani : " Poor Jesus, in my selfishness I have spoken too much to Thee of my own sorrows. But forgive me, forgive me and come back."<sup>5</sup> Or with another generous soul : " What causes me more pain than all my interior trials, and is a veritable torment, is the offences offered to my Beloved One and the suffering He has to endure." Despite their innocence and their virtues, these souls, inundated with heavenly light, see themselves as unworthy to appear before God's infinite sanctity, and in their ardent desire to please Him, they willingly accept the most excruciating purifications. This shows how much humility helps to render submission easy, and how powerfully it disposes to holy abandonment.

On the contrary, a soul imperfectly established in obedience and humility exposes herself on that very account to numberless trials, and is hardly in a disposition to welcome them. Whether our troubles come from God or from men, unless we recognise that we have deserved them and have need of them, we consider ourselves misunderstood, assume the air of victims; we resist or we pout. And God's favours will be abused not less than His punishments. Relative to this, Our Lord has declared : " Humility is as necessary to a soul replenished with graces as is water to a flower. In order to expand and to keep herself fresh and beautiful, this soul must be steeped

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<sup>5</sup> *Gem. Gal.*, xv.

in humility and continually moistened with its salutary water. If she were always exposed to the ardours of the sun, she would quickly dry up, wither and fall."

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus strongly recommends a way of spiritual infancy, a way full of confidence and love. She makes humility its foundation, for there can be none other. Her practice and teaching can be summed up as follows: Love God and offer Him many little sacrifices; abandon yourself to His arms like a little child, and, in order to that, obey like a little child and be humble as a little child. She therefore made herself the servant of her sisters, tried to render obedience to all without exception, and had no fear but the fear of following her own will. She knew well how to keep herself from being lifted up by pride, and how to remain always little through humility, so little that she was content that nobody should think of her, that all should trample her under their feet, that the Divine Infant should treat her as a toy of no value. What death to self, what humility above all did she not require to bring her to such a degree of perfection! It is nothing surprising, then, that God has glorified a soul so generous and humble and has made her the great wonder-worker of our times.

Mgr. Gay, speaking of this spiritual infancy, exclaims: "Oh, how perfect a way it is! More perfect than the love of suffering, for nothing demands such a sacrifice of a man as to remain sincerely and tranquilly little. Pride is the first amongst the capital sins. It is the source of all concupiscence and the essence of the poison poured out upon the world by the old serpent. The childlike spirit destroys it more surely than the spirit of penitence. A man's pride can easily find its account in the struggle with tribulation. He may regard himself as a great penitent or victim and become lost in self-admiration. But the true childlike spirit is the despair of self-love.... Press as you please this fruit of holy infancy: you can never make it yield anything except the nectar of abandonment to the will of God. A child surrenders itself without defence

and abandons itself without resistance. What does it know? What can it do? What does it comprehend? What does it pretend to know, or to be able to do, or to comprehend? It is a being of which one is absolute master. Hence it is treated with such care and made the recipient of so many caresses. Do we ever see the same love and tenderness lavished on such as prefer to manage their own affairs?"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Abandon*, ii.



## CHAPTER II

### ON FAITH IN PROVIDENCE

“**T**HE just man liveth by faith ” (*Rom. i, 17*), and he must have a deep and vivid faith to attain to holy abandonment. Now, the light of faith grows brighter in proportion as we purify ourselves and advance in virtue. But it becomes particularly luminous and penetrating when we have arrived at the unitive way, at that degree of perfection where the soul, already purified and rich in virtue, lives principally by love and in intimate union with God. Then the shadows appear less dense, the veil has become transparent. God, remaining always hidden, allows us to feel His presence and sometimes makes us experience very sensibly the sweetness of His loving caresses. Like Moses on the Mount, we treat with the Invisible as if we saw Him. With such a vivid faith, abandonment is easy; without it, we cannot attain to that height, or at least we cannot for long maintain ourselves there.

We are going to speak here of faith in Divine Providence.

Nothing happens in this world except by the order or permission of God. Nothing exists except through Him. And all that He has created He conserves and governs with love, in order to conduct it to its end. Whilst ruling the stars and presiding over the revolutions of the earth, He concurs with the ants in their labours, with the insects that throng the air in their least movements, and with the countless millions of atoms constituting a single drop of water in their invisible activities. Without Him not a leaf can stir, not a blade of grass die, not a grain of sand be moved about by the wind. He keeps a solicitous watch over the birds of the air, over the lilies of the field; and as each of us is worth more than many birds, He does

not forget His human children. A thousand details of daily life will escape the notice of the father of the family and the most attentive of mothers; but God in His infinite intelligence possesses the secret of providing without effort for the most trivial incidents as well as for the most important events. Yea, He has numbered the very hairs of our heads; not one of them can fall without the permission of our heavenly Father. And what can seem so insignificant as the fall of a single hair? Nevertheless, God thinks of it. With much greater reason, then, can each of us say: "When I am hungry, God thinks of it; when I am thirsty, God thinks of it; when I undertake any work, God thinks of it; when I have to choose a state of life, God thinks of it; when difficulties arise in that state, God thinks of them; in order to resist a temptation or fulfil a duty I need such or such a grace, God thinks of it; in my journey to eternity I require the daily bread of soul and body, God thinks of it; when death approaches I need to have my graces multiplied, God thinks of it; I am now on my dying bed, at my last gasp, and unless I am helped I shall be lost eternally, God thinks of it." <sup>1</sup> And thus I, an insignificant atom in the great world, occupy day and night, always and everywhere, the mind and the heart of my Father in heaven. Oh, how infinitely touching is this truth of our holy faith, how touching and how consoling!

But if God Himself forms the designs that affect us, He entrusts to secondary causes, at least as a rule, the execution of such designs. To this end He employs the sun, the wind, and the rain; He sets in motion the heavens and the earth, insensible creatures and also intelligent agents. But as none of these can exercise any activity on us except that which they derive from Him, we should look upon them as so many collaborators of Providence and instruments in the fulfilment of its beneficent purpose. Consequently, "in the cold that chills me, I

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<sup>1</sup> Desurmont, *Provid.*, 1<sup>re</sup> P., c. iii.

must recognise Providence; in the heat that gladdens me, I must recognise Providence; in the wind that blows and wafts my ship far from or near the port, I must recognise Providence; in the success that encourages me, in the adversity that tries me, in this neighbour who causes me pain, in this other who gives me pleasure, in this illness, this remedy, this revolution in public affairs, in these persecutions, these triumphs; it is still Providence, always Providence.”<sup>2</sup> Nothing can be more reasonable than the habit of thus seeing God in all the events of life. And how much it contributes to our peace and to our sanctification!

Our Father in heaven is truly a hidden God. As He has hidden His word beneath the letter of Holy Scripture, and as Our Lord veils His presence behind the Sacramental Species, so does the Sovereign Ruler, desiring to remain invisible to us that we may have the merit of faith, conceal His action from our eyes under the action of creatures. “We have an attack of sickness. What has been the cause? Apparently we must attribute the malady to a change of weather or to the severity of the season. In reality, it is God Who has commanded the elements to attack our health. He always remains in the shadow, so that His action never appears. Yet the sickness runs its course; it either becomes worse or it yields to the remedies. Who is responsible for this progress or cure of the malady? The physician, we say, and his imprudence or skill. Perhaps! But the truth is that God acts through all secondary causes, and it is He and He alone on Whom it depends whether the patient shall die or recover. Yes, but we do not see Him. This great God continues to hide Himself. And it is all the more difficult to discover the Supreme Cause for that secondary agents often demand so much of our attention.”<sup>3</sup> With a lively faith, we consider creatures, not in themselves, but in relation to the First Cause to Whom they owe their activities.

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<sup>2</sup> Desurmont, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id. op. cit.*, c. i.

We see how "God moves them, mingles them, marshals them, opposes them, urges them towards the same objective by contrary ways." We observe the Holy Spirit employing men and the lower creatures to inscribe on souls a living Gospel. This book will not be fully comprehended until the great day of eternity. That which at present seems to us so confused, so unintelligible, will then fill our hearts with delight. Meantime, convinced that "everything in God's universe has its reasons, limits, and relations,"<sup>4</sup> we bow to it with respect as before the Holy Scriptures; we adore the hidden Divinity and abandon ourselves to His Providence. But if our faith be weak, how can we see God in the evils that befall us? How see Him particularly behind the malice of men? Rather are we inclined to attribute everything to chance and bad fortune. And so we find it hard to submit.

Chance is but a word without meaning. Or rather it is "Providence in disguise" for the man of faith; but it is the negation of Providence according to the usage of ill-disposed persons who desire to exempt themselves from the obligation of submission, prayer, and thanksgiving. "Nothing in our lives is due to chance," declares St. Augustine; "but whatever happens contrary to our wills, be assured that it is in accordance with the will of God, with His Providence, with the order He has instituted, with the consent He has given and the laws He has established;"<sup>5</sup> "It is certain that there are fortuitous events, unexpected occurrences; but they are fortuitous and unexpected only with regard to us. In reality, they are designed by an all-ruling Providence that subordinates and reduces all things to its service." "In conducting His rational creatures, God does not tell them His designs. They come and go, each in its own way. Chance brings it about that one man meets an opportunity of making his fortune, another an occasion of loss and ruin. Chance? Yes, for him who has not seen all the combinations leading

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<sup>4</sup> Caussade, *Abandon vertu*, c. ii.

<sup>5</sup> *Enarr in Ps.* cxlviii, 12.

to these results. But for God Who deliberately arranged the circumstances, it is all providential.”<sup>6</sup>

In the evils that befall us we must recognise the hand of God. “I am the Lord and there is none other,” He says by the mouth of Isaias. “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil” (*Is.* xlv, 5-7). Long before He announced through Moses: “I will kill and I will make to live, I will strike and I will heal” (*Deut.* xxxii, 39). “The Lord killeth and maketh alive, He bringeth down to hell and bringeth back again; the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, He humbleth and He exalteth” (*I Kings* ii, 6-7), He proclaims again in the Canticle of Anna, the mother of Samuel. “Shall there be an evil in the city which the Lord hath not done?” asks the Prophet Amos (*Am.* iii, 6). And the Wise Man assures us that “good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God” (*Eccli.* xi, 14).

I admit all this, someone perchance will reply, with regard to sickness and death, cold and heat, and a thousand similar accidents due to the activity of necessary causes, because these are always obedient to God. Man, on the contrary, resists Him. When my neighbour speaks ill of me, robs me, strikes me, persecutes me, how can I see the hand of God in such evil actions, since, so far from willing them, He absolutely forbids them? Therefore, I must only attribute them to the will of man, to human ignorance or malice. But it is no use trying to entrench ourselves behind such fallacious reasoning in order to avoid the duty of abandoning ourselves to Providence. For God Himself has declared it on His infallible word which we are bound to believe: that He acts in occurrences of this kind as in all others, and that nothing whatsoever happens independently of His will.

When God wills to punish the guilty, He chooses His instruments, men or demons, according as seems best to Him. To punish David's sin, He found avengers of His Justice in the monarch's own palace and family. Every

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<sup>6</sup> Desurmont, *op. cit.*, 1<sup>re</sup> P., c. ii.

time the Israelites hardened themselves in evil, He announced to them that He has chosen now one, now another of the neighbouring nations to bring them back to duty by means of terrible chastisement. The Assyrian people in particular was made the rod of the Lord's anger, and the instrument of His vengeance. Our Lord predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, guilty of deicide and impenitent. Titus became manifestly God's instrument in effecting the utter ruin of that city, so that there was not left of it a stone upon a stone. Later on, Attila could call himself with good reason "the flail of God." When Saul sinned and remained obstinate, the Spirit of God retired from him and an evil spirit, sent by the Lord, took possession of him and became his tormentor.

To try the just, God employs the malice of the demons and the perversity of sinners. Job lost his children and his possessions. He fell from opulence to misery. And then he said: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (*Job* i, 21). As St. Augustine remarks on this, "Job did not say: The Lord gave and the devil hath taken away, but: The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Everything has happened, not according to the devil's will, but according to the will of God. Refer, then, to Him all the evils that happen to you, for the devil himself can do you no hurt without His permission." <sup>7</sup> Joseph's brethren committed a most heinous crime in selling him. But he attributed it all to Providence, and often repeated: "It is God Who sent me before you into Egypt for your preservation. . . . You thought evil against me, but God turned it into good. It is not by your will that I am here, it is by the will of God Whom we cannot resist" (*Gen.* xlv, 1). When King David was fleeing from Absalom, Semei pursued him with maledictions and pelted him with stones, but the holy King would see in this only the action of Providence, and calmed the indignation of his followers by saying:

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<sup>7</sup> In *Ps.* xxxii.

“ Let him alone, for the Lord hath commanded him to curse David ” (II *Reg.* xvi, 10), that is, the Lord hath chosen him to chastise me.

In Our Saviour's Passion, the Jews who accused Him, Judas who betrayed Him, Pilate who condemned Him, the executioners who tormented Him, the demons who urged on all these wicked men were indeed the proximate cause of that horrible crime. But, unknown to them, God had arranged everything, and simply used their malice to execute His design. Our Lord has explicitly declared it to be so : It is His Father Who presents to Him the chalice ; Pilate would have had no power over Him unless it were given to him from above ; the hour of His Passion was the hour permitted by heaven to the powers of darkness. And after the example of his Master, St. Peter proclaimed : “ There assembled together against Thy holy Child Jesus Whom Thou hast anointed, Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do what Thy hand and Thy counsel decreed to be done ” (*Acts* iv, 27, 28). Thus, then, the Passion of Christ is the work of God, yea, the greatest of all His works.

“ Assuredly, the will of God is there. That will, so luminous in itself, is hidden in the profound night of the Passion. That invincible will is the soul of so complete a catastrophe. That will, so just, so good, so loving, remains queen and sovereign mistress throughout a chastisement so extreme and so entirely unmerited by Him on Whom it was inflicted. In fine, that thrice-holy will is the ultimate cause of so monstrous an iniquity. We live in this faith. . . . And nevertheless we think it unreasonable to be asked to recognise God's will, I do not say in the afflictions of holy Church and public calamities, but in our own particular losses, in our humiliations, disappointments, mischances ; in the small troubles, the nothings which we call our crosses and which constitute our habitual trials ! ” <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mgr. Gay, *Abandon*, i.

And why should not the hand of God be there? In sin we have to distinguish two elements, the material and the formal. The material element is only the natural exercise of our faculties. God gives His concurrence to it as to all our actions. In a sense, He is obliged to give it; for otherwise we should be reduced to impotence, and the Creator Who has judged it well to endow us with liberty would practically have withdrawn from us that gift. But what constitutes the merit or the guilt is the formal element of the act, and in sin this element is the voluntary want of conformity of the act with the will of God. This want is not itself an act; it is the negation of an act. God does not concur in it. On the contrary, He prohibits it by His precepts, and by His promises and menaces and the grace He offers us He tries to bring souls to their duty. He therefore does everything in His power to prevent sin, short of doing violence to our liberty. But in spite of all these inducements and deterrents, man, abusing his freedom, refuses to conform his own will to the divine will. God, therefore, is ready to give His concurrence to the material act of sin only. He does not concur in the sin considered as such. He permits it in so far as it cannot be prevented without violence to free-will. This permission is not, however, an authorisation, for He detests the sin, and only postpones its punishment to an opportune time. In the meanwhile, it enters into His design to draw good out of evil in favour of His elect. For this end He makes use of the weakness and malice of men, and even of their worst transgressions. He thus behaves like a father who, to correct his son, seizes the first rod within reach which, when no longer of use, is flung into the fire; or like a physician who prescribes leeches for his patient: these little animals only think of satiating themselves with the blood of the sick man; whilst he endures them with confidence, because he knows the doctor has limited their number and localised their action.

Thus, faith in Providence requires us to ascend to God



in all occurrences. "Here is a just man being persecuted, God wills it; here is a Christian reduced to beggary on account of his religion, God wills it; here is an impious man enriched through his impiety, God wills it. And what shall happen to me if I am faithful to my duty? Just what God wills." <sup>9</sup> Our losses, our afflictions, our humiliations we must never attribute either to the demon or to men, but exclusively to God as their true source. Men may be their immediate cause, and that by an inexcusable fault on their part. God hates the fault, but He wills the trial resulting to us therefrom. "Acknowledge that, if we knew how to see the will of God behind the accidents of every description with which life is filled, we should not condemn our angels to behold in us so much disrespectful astonishment, so much causeless scandal, so much unjust indignation, so much discouragement which dishonours God, and alas! so much despair which sometimes brings us to the brink of perdition." <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Desurmont, *op. cit.*, 1<sup>re</sup> P., c. ix.

<sup>10</sup> Gay, *op. cit.*, i.

## CHAPTER III

### ON CONFIDENCE IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE

“**T**HE human will is so amazingly suspicious that as a rule it trusts none but itself, and it is always in fear of prejudice to itself from the will and power of others. Anything we possess of particular value, our fortune, our honour, reputation, health, life itself, we refuse to commit to the care of another unless we are sure we can depend on him. For the practice of charity and of holy abandonment we must therefore have the fullest confidence in God.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, *perfect* abandonment, as a habit, cannot be found outside the unitive way, because there alone confidence in God attains its highest development.

Human wisdom is very short-sighted, and the human will very weak, changeable, and subject to a thousand failings. Consequently, instead of trusting to our own lights and distrusting all others, even God, we should rather supplicate and importune Him to cause His will to be done and not ours. For “His will is good, good in itself and beneficent to us, good as the good God and, I dare to say it, necessarily beneficent.”<sup>2</sup>

Who is He That watches over us with solicitous love and disposes of us by His Providence? It is the good God. He is so good that He is essential Goodness and Charity Itself, and in this sense “none is good but God alone” (*Luke* xviii, 19). There have been saints who participated to a wonderful degree in the divine goodness. Nevertheless, even the very best of men have possessed only a rill, or a stream, or at most a river of goodness, whereas God is the ocean of all goodness, goodness limitless and

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<sup>1</sup> Le Gaudier, *De perf. vitæ spirit.*, p. iii, s. ii, c. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Gay, *op. cit.*, i.

inexhaustible. When He has poured out upon us benefits almost innumerable, let no one think Him either wearied from giving or impoverished by His munificence. He has still an entire infinitude of goodness to dispense. In truth, the more He gives away the richer He becomes, for He gains the glory of being better known, loved, and served, at least by generous hearts. He is good to us : “ He maketh His sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust ” (*Matt.* v, 45). He never ceases from giving us proofs of His goodness, opposing to the multitude of our sins “ the multitude of His tender mercies ” in order by His goodness to conquer our malice. Sometimes He has to punish, because He is not alone infinitely good but infinitely just also, yet “ even in His anger He is not unmindful of His mercy ” (*Hab.* iii, 2).

This God, so infinitely good, is our Father Who is in heaven. Just as He delights in this title of “ the good God,” and recalls to us His ancient mercies over and over again ; in the same way He loves to proclaim Himself our Father. Because He is so great and holy and we so little and sinful, we might well have been afraid to approach Him. Therefore, to win our confidence and our affection He never tires of repeating in Sacred Scripture that He is our Father and the Father of mercies. It is “ from Him all paternity in heaven and earth is named ” (*Ephes.* iii, 15), and there is no father like our Father in heaven. He is a father in His devotedness, a mother in His tenderness. There is nothing on earth comparable to a mother’s heart for self-forgetfulness, profound affection, and inexhaustible mercifulness ; hence, nothing that inspires so much confidence and abandonment. And yet God’s tenderness for us immeasurably surpasses that of the best of mothers. “ Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb ? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee ” (*Is.* xlix, 15). What can He refuse us “ Who hath so loved the world as to give us His only-begotten Son ? ” (*John* iii, 16). He

knows well, much better than we, what we require for soul and body; and He commands us to ask it of Him, and only reproves us for not asking enough. Nor will He give a stone to His child when he asks Him for bread. And if He sometimes has to exercise severity in order to prevent us from ruining ourselves, it is always the love of the Father that wields the rod. He measures the force of each blow, and when He judges the chastisement sufficient dries our tears and pours soothing balm into our wounds. Let us have confidence in God's love for us, and never doubt His Heart of a Father.

He Who watches over us is our Redeemer. He is more than brother, more than the dearest and best of friends, for He is the physician of our souls, our own official Saviour. He is come to "save His people from their sins" (*Matt.* i, 21), to cure their spiritual maladies, to bring us "life and a more abundant life" (*John* x, 10), to enkindle on earth the fire of divine charity (*Luke* xii, 49). To save us: there is His task, His mission, His essential purpose. To succeed in this mission and purpose: there is His glory, His happiness. Can He be otherwise than interested in us? His life of hardships and humiliations, His Body furrowed with wounds, His Soul saturated with sorrow, Calvary and the Altar: everything about Him shows to what follies His love for us has led Him. Assuredly He has bought us at a great price (*I Cor.* vi, 20). How could we have cost Him more? And in whom, then, shall we put our trust if not in our sweet Saviour, without Whom we should be lost? Is He not besides the Spouse of our souls? Devoted, tender, and merciful towards everyone, He cherishes with a special predilection those who have left all things in order to attach themselves to Him alone. He makes it His delight to keep them near Him in the tabernacle, and to live with them in the sweetest of intimacies.

"When you find yourself in affliction," says De la Colombière, "remember that the cause of your trouble is He Who willed to pass His whole life in pain in order

to save you from eternal pains; He Whose angel is always at your side, by His order watching over your ways; He Who on our altars prays without ceasing and sacrifices Himself a thousand times a day in your interest; He Who comes to you in the Sacrament of the Eucharist with so much goodness; He Who has no greater pleasure than to unite Himself with you, to converse with you. But you will say: 'He smites me cruelly and lays His hand heavily on me.' How can you feel afraid of a hand that has been pierced for you and permitted itself for your sake to be fastened to the cross? 'He makes me walk along a thorny path.' If there was no other path leading to heaven, would you rather perish for eternity than suffer for a time? Is not this the same path which He has travelled before you and for love of you? Do you find in it a single thorn that has not been crimsoned with His Blood? 'He offers me a chalice full of bitterness.' Yes, but remember it is your Saviour Who offers it. Loving you so dearly, how could He have the heart to treat you with this severity unless He saw it was immensely profitable to you or urgently necessary?"<sup>3</sup>

Being so good and holy, He never exercises His influence upon us except for the noblest and most beneficent objects. His end is and must immutably remain the glory of God. " 'The Lord hath made all things for Himself and His own glory' (*Prov. xvi, 4*), as Sacred Scripture tells us. But let us not complain of that, because the glory of God is nothing else than His joy in giving us eternal joy, His happiness in making us eternally happy.... The universe having for its primary end the glorification of God through the beatification of the rational creature, it follows that the secondary end of all things, at least on the earth, is the Catholic Church, as the Mother of Salvation. All terrestrial events, all, even persecutions, are willed or permitted by God for the benefit of the Church. And in the Church herself everything is regulated with a view to the profit of the elect, since here on

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<sup>3</sup> *Serm. sur la soum. à la vol. de Dieu.*

earth the glory of God is identified with man's salvation. Hence we must conclude that a further end of the evolutions and revolutions occurring here below is the attainment by the elect of their eternal destiny. And perhaps we shall see in heaven how whole countries have been put in commotion for the salvation of some of the elect. . . . Is it not wonderful to contemplate God governing the universe with the exclusive object of making us happy and rejoicing in our joy?"<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, God's will is the sanctification of souls. Always and everywhere, this is the work that exclusively occupies Him. It is the purpose underlying all the occurrences, great and small, which agitate in different ways nations, families, and the lives of individuals. It explains why God wills that I should be sick to-day, contradicted, humbled, forgotten; why He has prepared this happy event for me, faced me with this difficulty, caused me to hurt my foot against this stone, exposed me to this temptation. It is His love for me, His desire of my happiness that regulates all His actions. With what confidence and docility we should submit and correspond to His guidance if we better understood His merciful ways! The more so when we remember that He has always infinite power and infinite wisdom employed in the service of His paternal goodness. He knows the particular end appointed for each soul, the degree of glory He has destined for her in heaven, the measure of sanctity He has prepared for her. In order that she may attain her end and become perfect, He knows what paths she must follow, what trials she must endure, what humiliations undergo. His Providence has control of the myriad events which make up the course of our earthly existence, and directs them all to the appointed end. On the side of God, with Whom rests ultimately the disposal of all things, there is nothing but light, wisdom, grace, love and salvation. Now, by reason of His infinite power He can do whatever He wills. He is the Sovereign Master "Who

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<sup>4</sup> Desurmont, *op. cit.*, c. iii.

holdeth the power of life and death, Who leadeth down to the gates of death and bringeth back again " (*Wisdom* xvi, 13). We experience alternations of sunshine and shadow, times of peace and times of affliction, prosperity and adversity : all this comes from Him. There is no event whatsoever over which His will does not preside as sovereign mistress. Everything falls out in accordance with His free ordinances. When He decrees to save Israel there is none who can resist His will, none who can make Him alter His purpose. For " against the Lord there is no wisdom, there is no prudence, there is no counsel " (*Prov.* xxi, 30).

It is true that in disposing of His rational creatures He respects their liberty. They have consequently the power to oppose their own wills to His will and apparently to thwart it. But in reality he has foreseen from all eternity the resistance of some and the submission of others, and He has formed His designs in the light of that prescience. In the infinite resources of His omnipotent wisdom He easily finds a way to change hindrances into helps, and to make the plots which demons and wicked men contrive for our ruin a means to our progress in virtue. " My counsel shall stand," so He speaks through *Isaias*, " and all My will shall be done " (*Is.* xlv, 10). Your efforts, proud rebels, are all in vain, for God's will must be accomplished. He allows you in your actions to follow your free-will, until the time comes to render to everyone according to His works. But all the means you employ to frustrate His designs, He will know how to make subservient to their accomplishment. " Of what, then, can we be afraid ? Rather what should we not hope for, being the children of so good a Father Who loves us and desires to save us, Who knows so well how to provide the most suitable means to that end and how best to put them in practice, Who manifests so much goodness in His ordinances, so much wisdom in His dispositions, so much prudence in the execution of His designs " <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, i, iv, c. viii.

## CHAPTER IV

### ON CONFIDENCE (CONTINUED): REPLY TO SOME OBJECTIONS

**T**HE Lord tells us by the Prophet Isaias that His thoughts are not as our thoughts, and that as the heavens are exalted above the earth so are His ways above our ways and His thoughts above our thoughts (*Is.* lv, 8-9). Hence it comes about that Providence is very often misunderstood by the man of weak faith and imperfect mortification. We now proceed to specify four immediate causes of such misunderstandings.

I.—Providence remains in the shadow so as to give us the opportunity and the merit of exercising our faith, whereas we want to see. God hides Himself behind secondary causes; the more these become manifest, the less does He appear. Without Him they can do nothing, they could not even exist. We know this well enough. And nevertheless, instead of ascending to Him, we make the mistake of confining our attention to the external phenomenon, agreeable or otherwise, and more or less enveloped in mystery. He does not enlighten us as to the particular end He pursues, the paths whereby He is conducting us thither, or the way already traversed. And we, far from putting blind confidence in Him, are anxious for this knowledge, and almost venture to ask Him for explanations. Would a little child be impatient to know where its mother is taking it, or why she chooses one road rather than another? Does not the patient go so far as to entrust his health, his life, the integrity of his members, to his physician or surgeon? This latter is only a man, but we have confidence in him on account of his devotion to his science and his professional skill. Should we not, then, impose infinitely more confidence in God, the almighty Physician, the incomparable Saviour? But at



least when all is dark around us and we know not where we are, how we should welcome a ray of light! Ah, if we had even the assurance that this is in truth the operation of grace, and that so far all goes well! As a rule, however, it is only when the Divine Artist has completed His work that we are in a position to appreciate it. God wills us to be content with pure faith and, putting our trust in Him, to preserve our hearts in peace, despite the enveloping darkness. And this is the first cause of our misunderstandings.

II.—Providence has views very different from ours regarding both the end to be pursued and the means of attaining it. So long as we have not entirely renounced the spirit of the world, we desire to discover a heaven here below, or at least a path of roses conducting us to paradise. Therefore we become unduly attached to the esteem of good people, to the love of our relatives and friends, to the consolations of piety, to tranquillity of soul, etc. Therefore also we feel such a repugnance for humiliations, contradictions, sicknesses, and trials of every description. Consolation and success seem to us, at least in some degree, the reward of virtue, aridity and adversity the chastisement of vice. We are astonished when we behold the sinner often prospering in this life, and the just man undone. God, on the other hand, has no intention of giving us a heaven on earth; He desires that we should merit our heaven, and as beautiful a one as possible. If the sinner is obstinately determined to ruin himself for eternity, it is necessary that he should receive in time the recompense of whatever little good he may do. With regard to the elect, their reward is reserved for them in paradise. Meanwhile, the essential thing is that they be purified and sanctified ever more and more, and made richer and richer in merits. Tribulation serves admirably as a means to these ends. God, therefore, deaf to everything but the voice of His austere and wise affection, labours to reproduce in us Jesus crucified, so that hereafter we may reign with Jesus glorified. Who does not

know the Beatitudes enumerated by the Divine Master? The cross, accordingly, is the present He most willingly offers to His friends. "Look at My whole life, full of suffering," He said to St. Teresa the Elder, "and be persuaded that they whom My Father loves most dearly shall receive from Him the heaviest crosses. The measure of His love is also the measure of the suffering He sends. How could I better prove My affection for you than by desiring for you that which I desired for Myself?"<sup>1</sup> Language supremely wise, yet how little understood! Here we have the second cause of our misunderstandings.

III.—Providence smites us severely, and poor nature complains. Our passions boil over, our pride seduces us, our wills allow themselves to be carried away. Grievously wounded by sin, we resemble one afflicted with a gangrened member. We realise clearly enough that nothing but an amputation can save us. Yet we have not the courage to carry out the operation ourselves. Therefore God, Whose love has no weakness in it, determines to render us this painful service. As a consequence, He sends us these unforeseen difficulties, this destitution, this contempt, these humiliations, this loss of external goods, this illness which is wasting our strength. All are the instruments wherewith He binds and squeezes the diseased member, strikes on the sound part, wounds and cuts to the quick. Nature cries out in pain. But God pays no heed, because this severe treatment is necessary for our cure and the preservation of our lives. Those tribulations which come to us from outside are sent as a remedy for the evil within us: to restrain our liberty that is so apt to wander, and to bridle the passions that carry us away. We have here the reason why God permits obstacles to our designs to appear from every quarter, why He ordains that our employments should be so full of troubles, that we can never enjoy the peace we so long for, that our superiors are so often opposed to our desires. This also explains why our nature is subject to so many

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<sup>1</sup> *Vie*, addit.

infirmities, why our occupations are so tiresome, why men seem so unjust and so annoyingly variable in temper. We have to endure assaults on every side from a thousand different opponents, so that our wills, only too free, being thus exercised, harassed, and exhausted, may at last detach themselves from themselves, and for the future have no other desire except to be conformed to the will of God. But our wills refuse so to die to themselves, and this is the third cause of our misunderstandings.

IV.—Providence sometimes employs means which disconcert us. The judgments of God are incomprehensible. We can neither penetrate their motives nor recognise the ways whereby He chooses to bring them to effect. “God begins by annihilating those whom He entrusts with any enterprise. Death is the ordinary way by which He leads to life. Nobody understands the road on which he is travelling.”<sup>2</sup> Neither do we understand how the divine action will turn to the advantage of souls. It seems to us not seldom to tend in the opposite way. But let us adore the sovereign wisdom which has disposed all things most perfectly. Let us be convinced that even what appear to be obstacles shall serve it as means, and that from the evils it permits it will be able to draw the good it has invariably in view, viz., the glory of God through the progress of the Church and the salvation and sanctification of souls.

Consequently, if we look at the question in the light of God we shall be forced to the conclusion that very often in this world what are called evils are not really such, nor is everything good which appears so to us. There are failures wherewith Providence blesses us, and there are successes which it sends us in punishment of our faults.

Of the countless examples on record, let us cite just a few. God promised to make Abraham the father of a great people, and that all nations should be blest in his seed. And then He commanded him to immolate the son through whom this promise would have to be fulfilled!

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<sup>2</sup> Gay, *op. cit.*, ii.

Had He forgotten His word? Certainly not. But He willed to put to the test the faith of His servant, designing at the proper moment to stay his hand. He purposes to make the kingdom of the Pharaohs subject to Joseph, and begins by abandoning him to the malice of his brethren. The poor boy was thrown into a well, led into Egypt, sold as a slave, then languished many years in prison. His career seemed to be ruined beyond hope. And yet it was through this series of calamities that God conducted him to his glorious destiny. Gideon was miraculously chosen to deliver his country from the yoke of the Madianites. He assembled a hastily levied army, which scarcely amounted to a fourth of the opposing force. But instead of increasing the numbers, the Lord dismissed nearly all. He retained only three hundred, and arming these with trumpets and lamps in earthen pitchers, He led them forth to what seemed more likely to be a butchery than a battle. And yet with this unpromising host He won for His people an astonishing and decisive victory. But let us leave the Old Testament.

After the triumph on Palm Sunday, Our Lord was betrayed, arrested, abandoned, denied, judged, condemned, buffeted, scourged, crucified, robbed of His reputation. Was it thus God the Father secured to His Son the nations of the earth as His inheritance? Hell was triumphant and all seemed lost. Nevertheless, it was precisely through this apparent defeat that Christ victoriously achieved our salvation. Again, He chose what was weak to confound the strong. With a dozen fishermen, ignorant and unknown, He went forth to conquer the world. They could do nothing of themselves, but He was with them. During three centuries He permitted His Church to be exposed to violent persecution, which indeed, according to the prophetic word, shall never wholly cease; but so far from being destroyed by the rage of her enemies, she was rather invigorated. The blood of martyrs has always been the seed of Christians, and it is so still, even in our own times. In vain the impiety

of philosophers and the sophistries of heresiarchs endeavoured to extinguish the lights of heaven : their efforts only served to render the faith more definite and luminous. The kings and nations of the earth raged " against the Lord and against His Christ " (*Acts* iv, 26), Who nevertheless was their real support ; but in His own good time the Son of the Carpenter, the Galilean, always victorious, has brought His persecutors down to the dust and cited their souls to His judgment seat. Whilst a never-ceasing succession of revolutions shake and convulse the world, the cross alone remains standing, luminous and indestructible, above the ruins of thrones and empires.

There are still other means, unlikely means, which God chooses to save a people, or to stir the multitudes, or to establish religious institutes. He once exercised in this way wonderful mercy in favour of the kingdom of France : in order to save it from total and imminent ruin, He raised up, not powerful armies, but an innocent child, a poor shepherdess, and it was by means of this feeble instrument He delivered Orleans, and brought the king in triumph to Rheims, where he was to be crowned. In quite recent times, He aroused whole nations by the voice of the Curé of Ars, an humble country priest, with but little resources apart from his sanctity.

God has in many ways proved His love for the Cistercian Order. He gave it three saints for founders, and prepared for it the most abundant benedictions. Nevertheless, he allowed persecution to try our fathers at Molesme and to pursue them to Cîteaux. St. Robert was obliged by obedience to leave his work unfinished. St. Alberic, during the whole time of his administration, St. Stephen for many years received hardly a single novice. Death, meanwhile, was busily emptying the stalls. Half the little community was carried off by an epidemic. The survivors began to ask themselves with troubled hearts if they would ever have successors, or if their work was destined to die with them. Was it,

therefore, the will of Providence to bring to naught their pious undertaking? On the contrary, it gave them the assurance of success, but in its own way : it accomplished the sanctification of the founders, it caused the rule to be rigorously obeyed in all its prescriptions, and it established on a secure basis regular observance and the interior life. Then, when the hive was fully prepared, it brought the bees in swarms.

God watched over the Blessed Marie-Madeleine Postel, who was to found, amidst many tribulations, a community destined to be the most numerous in the diocese of Coutances. Yet, during a period of thirty years He seemed to be occupied only in efforts to prevent her success. We see her "conducted by obscure ways, subjected to trials of every description, thwarted by events, afflicted by repeated failures."<sup>3</sup> Had the Lord forgotten His promises? On the contrary, it was just in this way that He brought them to complete fulfilment, by raising the foundress to the loftiest heights of holiness, and by impressing deeply upon the infant Congregation the spirit in which it ought to live. St. Alphonsus de' Liguori, the illustrious founder of the Redemptorists, saw himself in his declining years shamefully accused before the Sovereign Pontiff by two of his disciples. He was condemned, removed from his office as superior-general, and even expelled from the Order to which he had given existence. He found consolation in reading the *Life* of St. Joseph de Calasanza, founder of the Écoles-Pies who, like himself, had been persecuted, driven from his Institute, which was suppressed and later re-established by the Holy See. But St. Alphonsus predicted that God, having willed the establishment of his Congregation in the kingdom of Naples, would know how to maintain it there, and that, like Lazarus, it would issue forth from the tomb full of life, when he should be no more. "God has permitted this division," he declared, "for the purpose of multiplying our communities in the Pontifical

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<sup>3</sup> Legoux, *La Bse. Marie-Madeleine Postel*, cc. xi, xxvi, &c.

States." And in fact, when the aged Saint had drunk even to the dregs the chalice of humiliations and sufferings, when he had endured his martyrdom with unalterable patience, the schism, through the merits of this martyrdom, ceased as if by miracle, and the Congregation, more flourishing than ever, extended its branches into all countries. Thus, the terrible tempest, which seemed destined to annihilate this Institute, was chosen by God to be the means of propagating it throughout the whole world, and served at the same time to perfect the founder in sanctity. And the time came when the Saint's persecutors were the most zealous, according to his prediction, in striving to put an end to the schism. So much did their momentary success embarrass them and fill their lives with deception and remorse.<sup>4</sup>

Whenever there is question of the sanctification of an individual, God follows the same course, always austere, sometimes puzzling. Our holy father, St. Bernard, had a passionate love for his desert home, so full of God, "his happy solitude and sole happiness." The only thing he asked of the Lord was the grace of being allowed to pass therein the remainder of his life. Alas! the divine will dragged him repeatedly from the pious exercises of the cloister, plunged him into the midst of the world which he abhorred, and involved him in the tumult of a thousand affairs, foreign to his profession and contrary to his desires for repose in God. No longer was he able to give himself entirely to his Well-Beloved, to the business of his own and his brethren's sanctification. It troubled him. "My life," he exclaimed, "is a monster, and my conscience suffers agony. I am the chimaera of my age, living neither as a cleric nor as a layman. A monk by my habit, it is a long time since I have led the life of a monk. Ah, Lord, let me rather die, but let it be in the midst of my brethren." God, however, refused to grant his prayer, at least under this form; and the world has good reason to bless Him for it. For the Saint became

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<sup>4</sup> Berthe, *St. Alph. de Lig.*, I, vi, cc. x, xi, xii.

“ the counsellor of popes, the peace-maker of kings; he converted whole provinces, put a stop to schisms, extinguished heresies and preached a crusade.” And in the midst of all his triumphs and prodigies, he preserved his humility; he knew how to make a solitude in his soul, he practised all the virtues of the perfect monk, and never came back to his monastery without a multitude of new disciples. In very truth he was, not the chimaera, but the wonder of his age.

Under the oppression of public affairs, St. Peter Celestin used to sigh for his dearly-loved solitude; finally, in order to return to it he resigned the pontifical office. God granted his desire, but in a way he never expected, for He caused him to be confined in a prison cell. “ Peter,” said the holy ex-pontiff, addressing himself, “ you now possess here in this prison what you longed for so ardently : solitude, silence, a little cell, an enclosure, and darkness. Therefore bless God at all times, because He has given you the desire of your heart, in a way much more secure and more agreeable to His will than that which you contemplated. God wants you to serve Him in His own way, not in yours.” The Chevalier of Loyola, wounded under the walls of Pampeluna, must have thought his career at an end. But this is the moment for which God has been waiting in order, through so happy a misfortune, to bring about his conversion and thus give rise to the Society of Jesus. Is it not so that, day by day, the hand of God hurts us in order to heal us? Death diminishes our numbers and removes from us those on whom we depended. Inexplicable reports misrepresent our aims and actions; we lose thereby, at least in part, the confidence of our superiors; we are full of interior pains; our health becomes enfeebled; difficulties multiply within, and without the menace hangs constantly over our heads. In our distress we cry to the Lord, and we do well. Perhaps we implore Him to remove the bitter chalice. But He, as a tenderly loving Father, infinitely wiser than we, will not be so cruelly compassionate as to heed our sup-



plications, if He sees that they are opposed to our best interests. Rather will He keep us attached to the cross, and help us to die thereon more completely to ourselves, and through this happy death to pass to a new life of faith, love, abandonment, and true sanctity.

To sum up, let us never doubt God's love for us. Let us put unfailing trust in the wisdom and power of our Father Who is in heaven. No matter how numerous our difficulties, no matter how alarming events may be, let us pray, let us do all that prudence prescribes; but let us accept in advance whatever trials God may will, abandoning ourselves with confidence to the care of this good Master. Then everything, everything without exception, shall contribute to the profit of our souls. The great obstacle, that which alone can frustrate God's loving designs in our regard, is lack of confidence and submission: for He will not do violence to our liberty. If we by our resistance disappoint the purposes of His mercy, He will always have the final word, at least in the hour of judgment, and will infallibly obtain His glory at the last. As for us, we shall have lost irrevocably the increase of eternal happiness which He meant us to acquire.

## CHAPTER V

### ON THE LOVE OF GOD

**H**OLY ABANDONMENT, being perfect, loving, and filial conformity with God's will, can only come from charity. It is indeed the natural fruit of charity, in such sort that a soul so far advanced as to live by love will live also in abandonment. For it is the property of love to unite man intimately with God, the human will with the divine good-pleasure. Besides, this perfect conformity presupposes perfect detachment as well as perfect faith and confidence. Now, there is nothing that can elevate us to such a height of virtue except divine love, and love does it quite naturally.

Love by means of perfect detachment disposes us for abandonment. The habitual practice of holy abandonment implies a real death to self, which other causes may begin but lack the delicacy and power to complete. For this we require the love that is "strong as death." Love easily succeeds, because it is its very nature to forget all, to give itself without reserve, and to admit no division. It desires to see only the Well-Beloved, it seeks only the Well-Beloved, it loves whatever pleases the Well-Beloved. "The love of Jesus Christ," says St. Alphonsus, "makes us indifferent to everything. Sweet and bitter are equally welcome. We desire nothing that is pleasing to ourselves, everything that is pleasing to God. We are just as well satisfied to be employed in small things as in great, to have what is disagreeable as what is pleasant: it is enough for us that we are pleasing God, and all is well. Such, according to St. Teresa, is the power of perfect love. It makes us forget everything, every personal satisfaction, so that we can think of nothing

except how to please Him Whom we love " <sup>1</sup> To which St. Francis de Sales adds in his charming style: " If I truly love my Saviour alone, why should I not have as much regard for Mount Calvary as for Mount Thabor, since I find Him as really on the one as on the other? I love the Saviour in Egypt, without loving Egypt. Why should I not love Him at the feast of Simon the Leper, without loving the feast? And if I love Him amidst the blasphemies uttered against Him, without loving the blasphemies, why should I not love Him perfumed with the Magdalen's precious ointment, without loving either the ointment itself or the odour?" <sup>2</sup> And the holy Doctor's practice was in harmony with his teaching.

Love disposes to abandonment by rendering our faith more lively and our confidence more firm. It admits of no doubt that faith grows clearer and hope with less difficulty gains admission to the heart in proportion as the mist of the passions dissolves and we advance in virtue. But when we arrive at the unitive way, our convictions become still more luminous, we enter into heart-to-heart relations with God, relations full of confidence and intimacy; especially if a soul has learned by many experiences that she loves ardently and is still more ardently beloved, and if God has purified and refined her in the painful but beneficent crucible of passive purifications. As a child reposes tranquilly in its mother's arms and abandons itself with confidence to her care, because it knows by instinct how dearly she loves it: in just the same way the soul surrenders herself to Providence with entire tranquillity of spirit, when she has come to say to herself with a lively conviction: " It is my Father in heaven, it is the adorable Spouse of my heart, Who holds in His hands my life, my death, my eternity. Nothing can happen me except what He wills, and what He wills is my greatest happiness in the next world, and even in this." Thus, by thoroughly breaking our bonds and

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<sup>1</sup> *Amour de J.-C.*, c. ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Vie*, i-v.

giving to our confidence and faith their full perfection, holy love completes our preparation for abandonment.

Perfect love is the source of perfect abandonment. "Love is a bond which unites the lover to the person beloved, making one of the two; whereas hatred separates those whom friendship had united. The union produced by love is especially a union of wills. Love causes the lovers to have the same likes and dislikes in regard to every object that presents itself, so far at least as this is sanctioned by virtue; just as hatred fills the heart with sentiments and affections diametrically opposed to those of its object. Hence we must conclude that love is the measure of union and conformity of wills, so that imperfect love means imperfect conformity; increased love, increased conformity; perfect love, perfect conformity."<sup>3</sup> This is why beginners, speaking generally, content themselves with simple resignation, whilst proficients mount to a higher conformity, and none can attain to perfect conformity without a love correspondingly perfect: whereas, with such love the perfection of conformity can surely be reached. Let us again insist on this, so as to make ourselves better understood.

As everybody knows, the term of love is union. This is in accord with the words of St. John: "He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him" (*I John* iv, 16). Faith has here the support of experience. The peculiar action of divine love is to give the creature to God and God to the creature, to unite them intimately, the one with the other. Wherever this tendency to union is absent, there the love of friendship must be absent, too. When God presses the soul to His heart in a loving embrace, she unites herself to Him with all her powers; she would like to make the union a thousand times closer, to lose herself utterly in Him and to become one with Him. But when, by a loving artifice, He hides Himself from her so as to make her desire Him more ardently, the poor soul, fearing she has lost Him, runs hither and

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<sup>3</sup> Saint-Jure, *Conn. et Am. de J.-C.*, i, iii, c. viii.

thither seeking Him with amorous anxiety. His absence has excited in her an aching need of Him, an insatiable hunger, an inextinguishable thirst. God is necessary to her. She cannot do without Him. Nothing can console her for His absence, except the thought that she pleases Him by conforming to His adorable will, and the hope of finding Him again and more perfectly. She would wish to possess Him infinitely, so to speak, in the next world, in order that she might be able to love Him, to praise Him, to unite herself to Him to the full satisfaction of her desires. Meantime, she seeks Him here below without relaxation; she aspires to a union of love, growing ever more intimate, a union which, when it pleases God, gives her the feeling of delightful possession, yet a union wherein she shall often experience privation, unsatisfied longing, and laborious effort. In the first case, the soul is actually united to God. In the second, she is striving after this union. In both there is the same tendency of love which takes us out of ourselves to plunge us into God, with the ardent desire to possess Him. This union of hearts begets a union of wills. As soon as we are filled with a deep affection for God, and have given ourselves to Him without reserve or division, in possessing our hearts He becomes Master of our wills also, and we can no longer refuse Him anything.

In heaven we shall enjoy our union with God amidst the pure delights of the Beatific Vision. Here on earth we find it more often on Mount Calvary than on Thabor. Joyous union is of rare occurrence and short duration, and is generally both preceded and followed by suffering. God revealed to St. Jane de Chantal in ecstasy that "to suffer for Him is the nourishment of love on earth, just as to rejoice in Him is the nourishment of love in heaven."<sup>4</sup> And St. Margarite Mary echoes the language of her holy foundress in saying: "The worth of love is measured by its willingness to suffer. Without suffering, we cannot live the life of love. . . . To desire to love God without suffering is but an illusion." In truth, we have need of

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<sup>4</sup> Bougaud, *op. cit.*, c. v.

suffering to purify, to detach, and to adorn our souls, and thereby to prepare them for union with God. We need it further to foster this union, to prevent its loss, and to bring it to perfection. The ardours of love alone would not suffice for these ends. And the reason is: because love does not live exclusively on what it receives. Rather it lives much more on what it gives: sacrifice is always its best aliment. This is the case even with human affection. Is not the child that costs its mother the most pain and the most tears always the most tenderly cherished? In the same way, we attach ourselves to God in proportion as we have immolated ourselves for Him. The union of heart and will becomes firmer and, in a sense, indissoluble, when cemented by the habit of sacrifice.

As for the union that is born of the delights of love: will it outlive these delights? Possibly. At all events, it has need of trials to strengthen it and show what it is worth. When God lavishes upon us the ineffable sweets of His tender affection, when He caresses us lovingly as a father straining his little child to his heart: our souls, stirred to their depths, panting with joy, utterly distraught, go out of themselves, give themselves to Him unreservedly, and make a sincere surrender of themselves. But self-love is far from being finally extinguished. It can even find its most delicate aliment in the sweetness of such transports. Therefore, to complete the work of these divine caresses, to secure the defeat of nature and the lasting triumph of holy love, we require the slow and painful action of suffering, properly accepted. Let us, then, courageously allow ourselves to be crucified; it was on Calvary our souls were born, and it is in the cross they shall always obtain life.

Suffering, therefore, is an aliment essential to holy love, and it is a very sustaining aliment. We have this on the testimony of an enlightened soul. The more Our Lord favoured her with sufferings, the more He permitted her to be humbled, and gave her the grace to realise her own incapacity and to feel how utterly useless she was, so

much the more did He communicate Himself to her and tenderly embrace her. "Divine love increases in pain. The more poignant the pain, the greater the ardours of love. The more cruelly sadness oppresses the soul, the more sensibly does she feel the flames of divine charity burning within her, whilst words of fire escape from her heart." Often Our Lord sent her sickness which made it impossible for her to communicate, but He compensated her for the privation of the Eucharistic Bread by giving her in abundance the bread of tribulation. In short, "suffering was the substantial bread with which Jesus willed to nourish her." She quite understood, and only prayed Him never to deprive her of this divine aliment. Such has been ever the language of all great souls. In order to attain to so coveted a union with the God of their hearts, they were ready to endure every species of violence and torment. Nevertheless, they were far from being insensible to pain.

Love, however, assuages the bitterness of suffering. It even makes suffering something to be desired and sought after. "How many little crosses I meet every day!" exclaims a fervent soul. "I love them all, even though they make me suffer exceedingly. If I ceased to suffer, I could not believe that I any longer loved. If I ceased to suffer whilst still experiencing the ardours of a burning love for God, I should not be happy, because I should fear I was being made the sport of the demon." The Blessed Marie-Madeleine Postel goes still further. "When we truly love," she says, "we have nothing to suffer, because we find so much happiness in suffering for our Beloved."<sup>5</sup> And St. Francis de Sales reveals to us the secret of this heroism. "Look at afflictions in themselves, and they appear terrifying enough. But look at them in the divine will, and you shall find them full of love and sweetness. If we consider suffering apart from the will of God, we shall see it with all its natural bitterness; but when we regard it as coming from the divine

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<sup>5</sup> Legoux, *op. cit.*, 2<sup>e</sup> vol., c. xxvii.

good-pleasure, it becomes a thing of gold, precious and amiable beyond description. When disagreeable medicine is presented to us by a beloved hand, we accept it gladly, our repugnance yielding to love. Now, the hand of the Lord is as amiable when it sends us afflictions as when it lavishes consolations upon us. A truly loving heart is even more enamoured of God's good-pleasure when on the cross, amidst pains and hardships, because it is the characteristic of love to make the lover suffer for the sake of the Beloved." <sup>6</sup>

Finally, love justifies Providence and approves all its ways. "The child of God believes in his heavenly Father, he adores Him, he trusts Him, but above all he loves Him. And because he loves Him, he feels an affection for everything that comes from Him, even when His Providence appears harsh and severe. Thus, his filial love pushes almost to extravagance the respect he feels for all that is sent us from heaven. St. Francis de Sales disliked to hear people complaining of the weather: 'a bad day,' 'it is bitterly cold,' or 'it is excessively warm.' Such language, he used to say, does not become a child of Providence, who should always bless the hand of his heavenly Father." <sup>7</sup> Love acts in the same manner when secondary causes and human malice intervene. Beyond and above the events and the visible agents it sees the Well-Beloved, the God of its heart, and so, with a filial affection and unalterable reverence, it kisses the hand that smites it.

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<sup>6</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. ii.

<sup>7</sup> Desurmont, *op. cit.*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., cc. iii et v



## CHAPTER VI

### ON THE LOVE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

**I**N this way of love and abandonment, Our Lord possesses a singular power for ravishing our hearts and thereby captivating our wills. God like the Father and the Holy Spirit, He has made Himself man like us. He is true God become as our Brother, our Friend, the Spouse of our souls; God brought wonderfully within our reach, God invested for us with an incomparable human charm. The Sacred Humanity is the gate which admits us to the secrets of the Divinity. It offers to our thoughts a precious support, to our hearts a delightful attraction, to our wills an imitable model. Jesus is the Saviour to Whom we owe everything, the Head Who communicates life to us, the Way we must follow, the Guide Who marches before us, the Viaticum That sustains our strength, the Term to Which we must attain, the only Recompense we covet. He is our Alpha and Omega, our first Beginning and our last End.

Apart from the special attraction of grace which should always be respected, we cannot too strongly counsel pious souls to prefer nothing to Our Lord in their devotions, to give Him always the pre-eminent place. The practice most recommended by the masters of the spiritual life is to contemplate Him principally on Calvary and on the Altar. Many, however, prefer the devotion to the Sacred Heart or to the Sacred Infancy. The essential thing is to keep Jesus ever before our eyes as the Object of our contemplation, in our hearts as the Object of our love, in our wills as our Master and our Model. For the rest, each should follow his own special attraction and seek the good Master where He can be most easily found. Every one of His mysteries contains all that is necessary to satisfy the

most varied aspirations and needs. But always it is the willing Victim going to the Sacrifice, always the "Spouse of Blood" inviting us to suffer with Him: for "His whole life was but a cross and a martyrdom."

The Child Jesus, to speak only of Him, has a hand that is as firm as it is gentle. He is too wise to spoil what He loves. "One day during Mass He presented Himself before a certain religieuse with a number of crosses in His hands. The crosses were of all sizes, but most of them were little ones. They were so many that He found it hard to hold them all, and He said to her very graciously: 'Will you receive Me with all My train?' By His train He meant the crosses. 'Oh, yes, my sweet and amiable Child,' she answered, 'I will receive Thee with all Thy train. Come, and I will make Thee welcome.'"

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus offered herself to her sweet Friend "to be His little plaything, begging Him to treat her, not at all as a beautiful toy, which children are content to gaze at without venturing to put their hands on it, but as a little ball of no value, which He might throw on the ground, kick with His foot, puncture, leave aside in a corner, or press to His heart if it so pleased Him. In a word, she desired to amuse the little Jesus and to subject herself to all His childish caprices. He heard her prayer; nor did He neglect to puncture His little ball, desiring, no doubt, to see what was within."<sup>1</sup> It would be impossible to describe in more charming language what was in truth a bitter crucifixion, a veritable death to self. And for this stern work the gentle hand of the Infant Jesus proved itself quite strong enough.

The Passion exercises the most general attraction. It was the special devotion of our holy father, St. Bernard. "From the very beginning of my conversion to God," so he tells us, "to make up for all the merits which I knew myself to lack, I applied myself with diligence to collect together and to bind into a bundle, and to place between my breasts all the cares and sorrows which my

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<sup>1</sup> *Histoire*, vi.

Lord had to endure: in the first place, the sufferings of His childhood years; then the labours He underwent in preaching, the fatigues of His journeyings, His watchings in prayer, His temptations and fastings, His tears of compassion, the traps set for Him in His speech; and finally His perils from false brethren, the revilings, the spittings, the blows, the mockeries, the reproaches, the nails, and all the other myrrhic plants which, as you know, are plentifully growing for our healing in the evangelical forest. . . . No man shall take from me this little bundle of myrrh, for it shall abide between my breasts. I have convinced myself that wisdom consists in meditating on the sufferings of my Saviour. In them I have placed the perfection of justice, the fulness of knowledge, the riches of salvation, the abundance of merits. From them I sometimes drink a draught of salutary bitterness, and sometimes, again, I extract therefrom the soothing oil of consolation. It is they that support me in adversity and sober me in success; and as I journey along the royal but rugged road that leads to heaven, amid the joys and sorrows of this mortal life, it is they that keep me safe from hurt, defending me against the enemies that lurk on every side. . . . Therefore, as you yourselves can bear me witness, I have these mysteries of divine suffering often in my mouth, and God can bear me witness that they never leave my heart. How redolent of the same are all my writings, I have no need remind you. And so long as I live here below my only science, my only philosophy shall be to know Jesus and Him crucified.”<sup>2</sup>

One day Our Lord showed Gemma Galgani His five gaping Wounds, saying: “Look, my daughter, and understand what love means. Do you see this cross, these nails, these thorns, this livid flesh, these bruises, these wounds? All is the result of love, infinite love. See, then, to what a degree I have loved you. And if you desire to love Me truly, learn first of all how to suffer, because in suffering you will learn how to love.” This

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<sup>2</sup> *In Cant., serm., xliii.*

vision of the Redeemer, all covered with blood, produced in the heart of His servant the sentiment of love even to sacrifice, and the longing to suffer something for Him Who had suffered so much for her. She put away all her jewelry: "The cross and its thorns," she said, "are the only jewels that should adorn the spouse of a crucified King." She yearned to suffer, in order to resemble her Well-Beloved. "I want to suffer," she cried; "I want to be like Jesus, and to suffer as long as I live." Her Guardian Angel presented for her choice a crown of thorns and a crown of lilies. "I will have the crown of Jesus," was her answer; "that alone satisfies me." Then with eager haste she took the thorny crown, covered it with kisses and pressed it to her heart. "I desire none of the consolations of Jesus," she declared. "Jesus was the Man of Sorrows: it is my wish to become the daughter of sorrows." Whilst enduring a prolonged trial, she said to Our Lord: "How sweet it is to suffer with Thee!"<sup>3</sup>

Another generous soul, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, declared it her happiness "to follow the way of Calvary as a spouse by the side of the Divine Crucified."<sup>4</sup> A certain religieuse believed she heard Our Lord addressing to her the words: "Are you willing to love Me in suffering, sacrifice, and contempt?" She assented with courage. But when tribulation came under one form or another, the first feeling she experienced was one of repulsion. Then the Divine Master said to her: "Allow yourself to be flayed, to be immolated. . . . The spouse of a crucified God, it is necessary that you should suffer. My child, drink of My chalice, the chalice of sadness, of anguish, of sorrow." After receiving the most sublime favours, she thinks less than ever of being exempted from suffering. She rather says: "More than ever I must drink of the same chalice as Jesus, walk the same way with Him, die on the same cross with Him." The good Master taught her that generosity is the measure of love

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<sup>3</sup> Gem. Gal., cc. iv et vi.

<sup>4</sup> *Sr. Élisabeth de la Trinit.*, xiv.

and that she should smile at every tribulation. She agreed to renounce all consolation in order to console her afflicted Love. "I want to love Thee, my God, in Thy desolation. But I want to love Thee with indifference to and forgetfulness of myself and all creatures. How can I ever again give a thought to myself?" So, she wished no longer to rejoice in His presence, but only to suffer that He might find pleasure in visiting religious and priestly souls; she wished to die that He might live in all hearts.

Jesus is the Saviour of the world. He raises up generous hearts and excites in them a burning zeal in behalf of the souls that are perishing, in behalf of their Well-Beloved Who is so badly served and so much offended. These He associates with Himself in the work of redemption, for the continuation of His sacrifice. He complained to Gemma Galgani of the malice, ingratitude, and general indifference of men: He is as much forgotten by them as if He had never loved them, never suffered for them, as if He had become a stranger to them all. Sinners remain obstinate in their malice, the lukewarm will not do themselves violence, the afflicted fall into despair; He is almost left alone in His churches; His Heart is continually a prey to sadness. Hence there is need of an immense expiation, particularly for the sins and sacrileges wherewith He sees Himself outraged by the very souls He has chosen out of thousands. And Gemma's great heart accepted the duty of love and expiation. "I am the victim," she says, "and Jesus is the sacrificing Priest. To suffer! To suffer! But to suffer without any consolation, without the least alleviation, to suffer for love alone. It is enough for me to be the victim of Jesus, in order to expiate my own innumerable sins and, if it be possible, the sins of the whole world."<sup>5</sup> Thus spoke that innocent child. All the other great souls whom the Divine Victim of Calvary has called to co-operate with Him in the world's redemption have been similarly marked with the sign of the cross. In the felicitous

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<sup>5</sup> Gem. Gal., cc. xxii et xxiv.

language of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, "He has, in a sense, assumed additional humanities in which He can still suffer for the glory of His Father and the needs of His Church, and perpetuate on earth His life of reparation, sacrifice, praise and adoration." <sup>6</sup>

Not less beautiful are these words uttered by a soul aflame with the desire of beholding God: "At this time of persecution, at the moment when the spouses of Jesus are summoned to Calvary, death has lost its attractions for me. I desire rather to go with Jesus to Golgotha. I desire to suffer with Him and for Him. But when the hour of His triumph is come, oh, yes! then it shall be my happiness to unite myself to Him inseparably. For Thee, O my Jesus, I wish to suffer. For Thee, O my Jesus, I wish to die; yea, to die without any consolation. But whilst I live, I desire, for Thy sake, O Jesus, to remain hidden, unknown, and despised. To give Thee, O my Jesus, some consolation and to gain souls to Thee, I wish to forget myself, to renounce myself, to immolate myself. My nature does not love suffering, as Thou knowest well. It revolts often in presence of affliction, but in my heart I am content to suffer anything whatsoever for Thy sweet sake. O Jesus, my own heart is too little to love Thee with. Give me the hearts of all who do not love Thee, and I will consecrate them all to Thy pure love."

The angelic St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus wished to be a priest, so that she might hold Jesus in her hands and give Him to souls in Communion. She would have liked to illumine the world, as the great Doctors of the Church, to announce the Gospel throughout all countries and in all times. Above all, she desired to suffer martyrdom, but a martyrdom varied with every description of torment. "Like Thee, my adorable Spouse, I should wish to be scourged and crucified. I should wish, like St. Bartholomew, to be flayed before being put to death. Like St. John, I should wish to be plunged into boiling

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<sup>6</sup> *Sr. Elis. de la Trin.*, cc. xii et xiii.

oil; and, like St. Ignatius, to be ground between the teeth of wild beasts, so as to become bread worthy of God. With Sts. Agnes and Cecilia, I should wish to offer my neck to the sword of the executioner, and with St. Joan of Arc on the flaming pyre to murmur the name of Jesus." But God had other designs for her. Love was her special vocation. And she proved her love for Jesus by strewing His path with roses. That is to say, by missing no opportunity for little sacrifices for His sake, offering Him every word and look, profiting by her least movements, acting, suffering, even rejoicing from the motive of love.

God grant that such sublime sentiments may always be our guide in the practice of abandonment! Those illustrious servants of God, whom we delight to quote, offered themselves as victims of expiation and sometimes asked for sufferings. We have already declared what we think of this manner of acting.

## CHAPTER VII

### ON THE EXAMPLE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

**T**HERE is nothing that can lead a soul inflamed with the love of Our Lord so swiftly and surely to holy abandonment as the example of her well-beloved Master. He is her sovereign delight, and she wishes to please Him alone. Consequently she endeavours to imitate Him in everything. Now, His whole life on earth was but a continual exercise of obedience and abandonment.

He enters this world. "He comes first of all," says Mgr. Gay, "for His Father's sake. The Father is the Object of all His religion and the Term of His sacrifice. To Him He addresses Himself, therefore, and this is what He says: 'Behold, I come to do Thy will.' What! Does He not come to preach, to labour, to suffer, to die, to vanquish hell, to found His Church, to save the world by His cross? True, this is indeed His task. He understands it perfectly. His eyes at their first opening saw everything, and what His eyes perceived His Heart immediately embraced. He wills to accomplish the whole of the task assigned Him, even to the least jot and tittle. He wills it with a will entirely sincere, loving, and efficacious. . . . But it is because such is the eternal will of His Father. Nothing but the Father's will touches and determines Him. He sees undoubtedly all the rest, but He attends to this alone, of this alone He speaks, on this alone He claims to depend. This divine will is everything to Him: His beginning, end, motive, light, support, dwelling, aliment, recompense. There He takes up His abode, there He retires and encloses Himself. And later on, whilst working so many wonders, wonders so sublime, so unheard-of, so superhuman, He will never do anything more than this very simple task wherein even



little children like us may imitate Him : He will never do anything more than accomplish the will of His heavenly Father. To it He will surrender Himself without reserve and with perfect and life-long abandonment.”<sup>1</sup>

This obedience and abandonment have their source in His love for His Father. It is the fulness of abandonment because it is the fulness of love : love filial, confident, disinterested, generous, unreserved ; love overflowing with gratitude for all the benefits which He has received in His Sacred Humanity ; love full of zeal, devotion and humility. The Victim laden with the sins of the whole world, He believes that all chastisements are due to Him, that no sufferings are too much to make reparation to His Father's glory, and to bring back to Him His wandering but most tenderly loved children. His love is filial and always the love of a child. “ Yes ! ” exclaims Mgr. Gay. “ Our Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus the eternal Son of God and true God like His Father, Jesus in His Human Nature remained always a little child. Infancy is the first state in which He willed to show Himself even to our eyes. But for His Father, to the eyes of the Divinity, His own Divinity, He has never ceased and never shall cease to be just a little child. In His Humanity He governs the universe, the Seraphim kiss His human Feet, the whole world salutes Him with good right as its Lord and Sovereign, the kings of the earth are His subjects, the peoples of the earth His inheritance, the angels His messengers, His Humanity is Queen as His Divinity is King : and yet I dare to say it : in His Human Nature He remains a little child, a child of a day, of an hour, having of Himself alone neither thought, nor speech, nor movement, nor life ; a little child hidden in the breast, carried in the arms, abandoned to the rights, to the ordinances, to the good-pleasures, to the ways, to the ineffable smiles, to the supremely sweet caresses, to the infinite love of that Divinity which is to Him both father and mother. In this He is the Model for every

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<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, préamb. et i.

abandoned soul. Since the eternal God is our Father, what signifies with regard to Him our age, our stature, our posture? Although we were as holy as Sts. Peter and Paul, as the greatest giants in sanctity, should we be ever otherwise than puny in the presence of the great God?"<sup>2</sup>

Could we but follow the life of Our Lord in its minutest details, we should find everywhere the love, the confidence, the docility, the abandonment of a little child. Let us cite some examples borrowed from St. Francis de Sales.

"See our poor little Jesus in His crib. He accepts the poverty, the nakedness, the company of dumb animals, the inclemency of the weather, the cold of the stable, and everything that His Father permits to befall Him. We do not find it written that He ever sought His Mother's breast, but neither did He refuse the little services she rendered Him. He accepted likewise the services of St. Joseph, the adoration of the kings and the shepherds, and all with equal indifference. Thus we also should neither desire anything nor refuse anything, but be willing to suffer and receive whatsoever the Providence of God may decide to send us."<sup>3</sup>

"If the sweet Infant Jesus, carried in the arms of His Mother, were asked where He was going, could He not have answered truly: 'I am not going anywhere, it is My Mother who carries Me'? And if then it were said to Him: 'But at least Thou art going with Thy Mother, art Thou not?' Might He not have again answered with truth: 'No, I am not going at all. Or if you insist that I must be going there where My Mother carries Me, it is still not with My own steps I am going, but with My Mother's. And as My sweet Mother walks for Me, so does she will for Me, too. I leave to her the care both of acting and deciding. Her will suffices for her and for Me, so that I need make no choice as to what regards

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, *op. cit.*, ii.

<sup>3</sup> *Entret.*, xxi.

My coming and going. Whether she walks fast or slowly, whether on this side of the road or that: I pay no heed. Neither do I inquire whither she is going, contenting Myself with being always in her arms and clasping her beloved neck.' " 4

During the flight into Egypt, Our Lord, Who is the Eternal Wisdom, and Who then enjoyed the perfect use of reason, did not forewarn St. Joseph or His most sweet Mother of what was to happen to them. He would not encroach in any way on the charge given to the Archangel Gabriel, who had been commissioned by the Eternal Father to announce the mystery of the Incarnation, to be thereafter the procurator-general, so to speak, of the Holy Family, and to watch over It in all events. This almighty Infant, so meek and humble of heart, suffered Himself to be carried whithersoever His guardians willed and by whatever road they willed. He abandoned Himself with docility to the guidance of the Archangel whom yet He infinitely surpassed in wisdom and knowledge.

According to some contemplatives, Our Lord, whilst in Egypt and during the thirty years of His hidden life, occupied Himself in St. Joseph's workshop with making crosses which He presented to His friends—a habit He still retains. Consumed with zeal for His Father, for His Church and for souls, " He experienced a million loving, languishing desires. He foresaw the hour when He was to be baptised in His Blood, and longed for its arrival, so that He might see us delivered by His death from the eternal death due to us." Yet when He entered the Garden of Olives He gave Himself up to the most terrible assaults of fear and repugnance, " enduring them voluntarily for love of us when He could have escaped them. Pain gave Him a horror of death, whereas love made Him desire it. Hence arose within Him a fierce conflict between the desire and the dread of death, resulting in a copious effusion of blood which trickled down to the earth. Nevertheless, He ceased not to repeat:

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<sup>4</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. xiv.

‘ My Father, not My will but Thine be done.’ Consequently, He allowed Himself to be arrested, bound, and led away, at the will of those who were going to crucify Him, abandoning His Body and His Life completely to their power. In the same way He would abandon His Soul and His will to the will of His Father with most perfect indifference. But first He must endure a last trial, and the most terrible of all, upon the cross, when, after He had forsaken everything from love and obedience to His Father, it seemed as if the Father had now forsaken Him. The tempest of human passions driving into utter desolation the barque of His Blessed Soul, He was hardly conscious of that supreme point of His Spirit which not alone kept its gaze constantly fixed on the Father, but was inseparably united to Him—like the mariner’s needle with regard to the pole. But the inferior faculties had no part in that union. So terrible was this trial that the divine goodness has never subjected any other soul to it, and never will; for none but the Soul of Jesus could possibly endure it.”

In order to teach us what we can do and ought to do when our affliction seems to exceed our strength, Jesus complained with filial affection to His Father: “ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” But He hastened to add, with all the energy of His Soul and with the most loving submission: “ Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit.” In that way He gave us the supreme proof of His love for His Father and for ourselves, “ dying in love, dying by love, dying for love, dying of love.” “ At the same time He teaches us that, when our tribulations are extreme, when the violence of our spiritual pains deprives us of every kind of comfort and of the means of resistance, we also should commend our spirit into the hands of Him Who is our true Father, and, bowing our heads in submission to His good-pleasure, give up our wills entirely to Him.” <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, cc. xii et xv; I, x, c. xvii; *Entret.*, iii et xii; *Lettre*, 432; *Serm. pour Exalt. de la S. Croix*.

This continual abandonment of a little child, Our Lord was pleased to practise in trials of every sort. For “He suffered without parallel in His civil life, being condemned as guilty of high treason against divine and human sovereignty, buffeted, scourged, mocked, and tormented under extraordinarily ignominious circumstances; in His natural life, dying amidst the cruellest and sharpest torments that can be conceived; in His spiritual life, a prey to sadness, fear, terror, anguish, interior desolation and oppression, such as none other has ever endured or ever shall endure.” And He suffered all this by His own free choice. “For whilst the highest part of His Soul enjoyed the supreme bliss of the Beatific Vision, love prevented this joy from communicating itself to the feelings, the imagination, and the inferior reason, thus leaving the whole heart exposed to the onslaughts of sadness and grief.”<sup>6</sup>

So has the Saviour instructed us, by His example, to accept manfully, and never to shirk, those numberless trials belonging to the natural or the spiritual order, of which we shall have to give a brief account further on.

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<sup>6</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, 1, ix, c. v.

# THIRD PART

## ON THE OBJECT OF HOLY ABANDONMENT

### CHAPTER I

#### ON THE OBJECT OF ABANDONMENT IN GENERAL

**P**ERHAPS it will not be useless to recall here the distinction between the signified will of God and His will of good-pleasure, for on this our present problem centres.

By His signified will God has clearly indicated and manifested in advance, once for all, "the truths He requires us to believe, the goods He requires us to hope for, the penalties He requires us to fear, the objects He requires us to love, the commandments He requires us to observe, and the counsels He desires us to follow."<sup>1</sup> The permanent signs of His will are the precepts of God and of the Church, the evangelical counsels, our religious vows and rules, and the inspirations of grace. To these four categories may be added the doctrine of the virtues, with the examples of Our Lord and the saints.

God's will of good-pleasure, on the contrary, is not known in advance: it will be manifested by the sequence of events. As a general rule, it escapes our foresight. Sometimes it upsets our plans. Its objects do not depend upon us, but on God, Who reserves to Himself the decision of them. For instance: at such or such a time in the future, shall we be in health or in sickness? in

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<sup>1</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, I, viii, c. iii.

prosperity or in adversity? in peace or in conflict? in aridity or in consolation? Shall we even be in life? Who can tell? What God wills for us we shall know when the moment arrives.

With regard to the events which constitute the object of the divine good-pleasure, abandonment is clearly indicated. It consists in an attitude of calm, confident expectation so long as the will of God has not been declared, and in a loving acquiescence the moment it is revealed to us. As a prerequisite condition, it supposes the virtue of indifference. For there is nothing more necessary than universal indifference if we desire to hold ourselves in readiness for every occurrence. On the other hand, until the divine good-pleasure is known, we can only wait for it; and it is fitting that we should wait with confident expectation and filial submission, since He Who has the disposal of us is our Father in heaven, essential Wisdom and Goodness. And forasmuch as the events are not in our own power, this attitude of peaceful and submissive expectation has nothing in common with Quietism. We simply have no alternative. Still, we must not forget what has been said elsewhere about prudence, and prayer, and personal efforts in abandonment.

Very different must be our attitude towards the signified will of God. He has explicitly declared "that He intends and requires that such and such things shall be believed, hoped for, feared, loved, practised." We therefore already know His requirements. And consequently we have no longer the right to be indifferent about willing or not willing them. As He has manifested His will to us in advance, we must not expect a new declaration of it for every particular occasion. The objects with which it is concerned depend upon our choice. It is for us to act by our own free determination, of course with the assistance of grace. That is to say, in presence of God's signified will, we have only to submit our own wills, at least in everything of obligation, "believing what He has taught, hoping for what He has promised, fearing what He has

threatened, loving His ordinances and living according to the same.”<sup>2</sup>

We shall sometimes meet with instances where the events are not completely withdrawn from our control : to a certain extent we can foresee them and make provision for their occurrence. On such occasions it will be necessary to add the exercise of prudence and personal efforts to abandonment, because we shall here have at bottom a combination of the signified will of God and His good-pleasure. In short, the good-pleasure of God is the domain of abandonment, His signified will, of obedience.

Consequently, there is no room for abandonment in what concerns our eternal salvation or damnation, or the means which God has commanded or counselled us to take in order to secure the one and avoid the other, such as the observance of the precepts of the Decalogue and of the Church, the avoidance of occasions, the practice of the virtues, fidelity to our vows and rules, obedience to our superiors, docility to the inspirations of grace. With regard to all such, God has manifested His will; and to ensure our faithful execution thereof He has made certain promises, uttered certain threats, sent us His only-begotten Son, established His Church, instituted the priesthood and the Sacraments, multiplied external helps, poured out in abundance interior grace. Evidently in these matters there can be no question of indifference. God requires obedience in what is of obligation. And with regard to matters of counsel, it is our duty to esteem them at the least, and never to dissuade generous souls from their observance.

“ Christian indifference being excluded from all that appertains to the signified will of God,” says Bossuet, “ we have to restrict it, as St. Francis de Sales does, to certain events regulated by the divine good-pleasure, whose sovereign decrees determine the daily happenings in the course of our lives.”<sup>3</sup> “ We should practise in-

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<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, I, viii, c. iii.

<sup>3</sup> *États d'or.*, I, viii, 9.



difference in what regards our natural life, as health, sickness, beauty, ugliness, strength, weakness; in what regards our social life, as honours, rank, riches; in what regards our spiritual life, as aridities, consolations, sweetnesses, disgusts; in our actions, in our sufferings, and in all kinds of occurrences.”<sup>4</sup> With respect to all that comes from the divine good-pleasure, indifference should be extended “to the past, the present and the future; to the body and all its different states; to the soul with all its miseries as well as to all its endowments; to prosperity and adversity; to the benevolence and malice of men; to all the vicissitudes of the physical and the revolutions of the moral world; to life and death; to time and eternity.” God varies His actions to suit the various conditions of souls. “People of the world He deprives of honours, temporal goods, and the pleasures of life. In the case of men of learning, He permits their erudition, their talents, their science, or their literature to be held in contempt. As for the saints, He afflicts them in what belongs to their spiritual life and the practice of the virtues.”<sup>5</sup>

Is it necessary to remark that, although joy as well as tribulation falls within the province of abandonment, tribulation furnishes us with far more frequent occasions for its practice? Everyone knows from his own painful experience that this earth of ours is a valley of tears where joys are few and fleeting.

Let us here point out two possible illusions.

I.—Some souls form great projects to serve God by wonderful actions and extraordinary sufferings, the occasion for which shall, perhaps, never present itself; and whilst carrying in imagination crosses that have no existence, they carefully avoid those much lighter ones which Providence sends them every hour. Is it not a deplorable self-deception to be so valiant in intention and so cowardly in presence of reality? God preserve us from

<sup>4</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix. c. v.

<sup>5</sup> Caussade, *Abandon*, app.

such imaginary heroisms, which often nourish a secret self-esteem! Instead of feeding on chimaeras, let us be practical in our abandonment, employing all our efforts to sanctify perfectly our real trials, those of the present moment.

II.—It would be a very serious illusion to despise or under-estimate our daily crosses because they are small. Individually, they are indeed small; but occurring, as they do, almost every instant, by their very multiplicity they provide the faithful soul with an immense sum of sacrifices and merits. Besides, there is nothing to prevent us from welcoming them with extraordinary faith, love, and generosity; and the sanctity of our dispositions will invest them with inestimable worth in the eyes of God. Undoubtedly, great crosses borne with equal love would be more meritorious and bring us a richer recompense. But then such crosses are rare; even when they do come, pride and self-seeking can easily find their account in them. “As a general rule, extraordinary actions are done with less charity,” says St. Francis de Sales; and nevertheless it is charity with other holy dispositions that “gives their worth and value to all our actions.”<sup>6</sup> Let us therefore have a high esteem for great crosses, but be careful not to undervalue our little trials, since it is from these we have to derive the greatest profit. “Let us practise conformity to the will of God,” writes Dosda, “even in the very smallest particulars, for instance, in the humiliation resulting from forgetfulness, or from awkwardness; in the annoyance caused by an importunate fly, or by the barking of a dog, or the hurting of our foot on a stone, or the extinguishing of our light, or the tearing of our habit.”<sup>7</sup> Above all, we should practise it with regard to the differences of character, the contradictions, humiliations, and the petty accidents which we so often encounter in community life.

After explaining at length the nature, motives, and the

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<sup>6</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, x, c. vi, *Ent.*, x.

<sup>7</sup> *Union avec Dieu*, 4<sup>e</sup> P., c. ix.

general object of abandonment, we might leave it to our readers to make for themselves the practical applications of our doctrine. But the trials to which souls are subject are so various that we think it worth while to study the principal ones, in order to be able to indicate, according to the nature of each, the special motives for patience and submission, to solve certain difficulties, and to give precise instructions relative to prayer, prudence, and personal efforts.

We shall consider successively first the trials which belong to the temporal order, then those of the common ways in the spiritual order, and finally those proper to the mystical ways.

## CHAPTER II

### ON ABANDONMENT IN TEMPORAL THINGS TAKEN IN GENERAL

**T**HERE are good and evil things in the temporal order. As good things we account knowledge, health, riches, prosperity, honours; sickness, poverty and misfortune are examples of evil things. To the world, such goods and evils appear supremely important and deserving of all our attention. That assuredly is a wrong estimate. Earthly objects should be judged in the light of eternity.

The sovereign good, the one thing necessary, is God. Consequently, as St. Thomas teaches,<sup>1</sup> the principal and ultimate goods for us are beatitude (in the assured possession of God) and the necessary means of attaining it. These are goods which cannot be abused: they cannot possibly turn to our detriment. Hence the saints have prayed for them in an absolute manner, according to the words of the Psalm: "Shew us Thy Face and we shall be saved" (Ps. lxxix, 4): this is beatitude. "Lead me into the path of Thy commandments" (Ps. cxviii, 35): here we have the way that leads to beatitude. With regard to temporal goods, it happens only too often, says the Angelic Doctor, that we put them to bad use; hence they may prove prejudicial to our best interests. How many owe their ruin to the possession of riches and honours! Therefore, we must not consider such as our principal and absolute goods, but only as secondary and transient. They are meant to assist us in our striving towards beatitude, in so far as they sustain our bodily life and provide us with opportunities for practising virtue. So long as they remain the secondary and do not become the primary object of our pursuit, it is perfectly lawful to desire them, to ask them of God in prayer, to seek them with moderately zealous assiduity, even to make provision for the future

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<sup>1</sup> *Sum.*, 2, 2, q. 83, a. 5-6.

according to the measure of our need and at the proper time. But our solicitude is excessive and culpable if, instead of employing such goods according to our necessity, we go so far as to regard them as our end, if we pursue them to the neglect of spiritual goods, or if we fear we shall be in want of necessities even when we have done all in our power to secure them : for in this case it is a duty to put our trust in Providence. Food, drink, and clothing are indispensable requisites. Therefore, respecting these, Our Lord does not condemn a moderate solicitude which makes us exert ourselves to provide them. He only reproves the excessive anxiety that would disturb our peace. And He concludes His instructions on Providence by counselling us to make spiritual goods the first object of our endeavours, assuring us at the same time that temporal goods shall be given in addition, and according to our necessity ; yet so if we do our own part (*Matt. vi*).

Whilst forbidding us to be over-anxious, like the pagans, concerning temporal goods, because our heavenly Father knows we have need of them, Our Lord expressly commands us to seek the kingdom of God, although our heavenly Father knows equally well what need we have of that. The reason is : our good Master wishes to arouse in us spiritual desires for which we are indisposed, and to repress those natural desires which spring up but too readily within us. Besides, He wants to teach us to distinguish between the goods we ought to pray for absolutely, such as the kingdom of God and His justice, and those that should be asked only under condition and with submission to the divine will.

“ Moreover, Jesus Christ Himself has taught us to ask for our daily bread, which has always been understood, in one of its senses, as a petition for temporal goods—the Church herself so understands it in her litanies and in the liturgy. Nor does the spiritually perfect soul exclude this petition from the seven in the Pater Noster. But such a soul, it will be said, asks nothing temporal. I reply : she

asks nothing temporal as an absolute good, or in an absolute manner, but she asks it as something conducive to salvation and under the condition of the good-pleasure of God.”<sup>2</sup>

“As a matter of fact,” says St. Alphonsus, “the divine promise to hear our prayers does not apply to temporal favours, as, for instance, health, riches, dignities, and other things of this kind. Very often God refuses such favours, and with good reason, because He sees they would compromise the salvation of our souls. Consequently, we should pray for temporal goods only with perfect conformity to the divine will and under the express condition that they shall not be prejudicial to our spiritual interests. As for spiritual benefits, we must ask them without any condition, in an absolute manner, and with the assured hope of obtaining them.”<sup>3</sup>

It is also with the eyes of faith and in the light of eternity that we must consider temporal evils. Sin, and particularly dying in sin with its eternal consequences: the forfeiture of our last end and ruin irreparable—this is the evil of evils, the *summum malum*. We must implore God, insistingly and absolutely, to preserve us from it at whatever cost. But poverty, sickness, bodily or mental infirmities, and such-like afflictions, even death itself, are only relative evils. Rather should we see in them, according to the designs of Providence, very precious graces, sometimes very necessary graces: the satisfaction for our faults, the remedy for our spiritual ailments, the source of magnificent virtues and multiplied merits—that is, provided we correspond with the action of God by our humble submission. Impatience, on the contrary, and want of confidence in our trials would only change the remedy into a poison, causing us to find disease for our souls, or even death, in what Providence intended for our sanctification. This being understood, we have a perfect right to ask God to deliver us from temporal evil, to remove from us war, pestilence, famine and other calamities,

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, *États d'or.*, I, vi, 18.      <sup>3</sup> *Vér. ép.* de J.-C., xx, 11.

public and private. Our Lord even makes us pray for this in the Pater Noster, and the Church likewise in her liturgy. Nevertheless, God has not promised always to grant such petitions, and they should not be made except subject to the condition of conformity to the divine will. But if we should be afraid of losing patience under trial, it will be sufficient to propose to God this alternative : either to lighten our burthen or to increase our strength. On the other hand, we must always pray, and in an absolute manner, for the spirit of faith, for patience and all the virtues necessary in times of tribulation. God certainly wills that we should practise these virtues so long as the trial endures. It is precisely for that end He has sent or permitted it.

Temporal goods and evils are therefore only relative. Both can be used as powerful helps to sanctity or abused to the detriment of our souls. Shall we have the wisdom to employ them as means to detach ourselves from earthly interests and to fix our affections on the only real goods, the goods of eternity? Shall we make such a use of the good things of the present life as not to forfeit those of the life to come? Shall we become like the fools that forget God in prosperity and murmur against Him in adversity? We cannot answer for ourselves. God alone knows the future. But this we know : that in presence of temporal goods and evils, we shall have various duties to discharge, the first of which shall always be that of conforming to the divine good-pleasure. God wants our conformity to be not a simple resignation, but a holy abandonment. That is to say, a universal indifference resulting from virtue, an attitude of general and tranquil expectation before the event, and, once His will has been declared, a loving, confident, and filial submission.

We shall now make a rapid survey of the situations common to all men whether within or without the cloister. The special counsels which we shall give for certain definite cases, our readers can extend for themselves to other analogous cases, according to the duties of their

particular states or positions. And with a view to establishing some order in so complex a subject-matter, we shall consider successively the temporal goods and evils which are outside us, those which have their seat within us, either in our bodies or in our souls, and finally those which depend on opinion. But first of all, it is necessary to say something about the natural goods and evils which lie completely beyond the control of ourselves and our fellow-creatures, and which we must accept whether we like it or not. We shall let Father Saint-Jure speak for us: "We must conform our wills to the will of God with regard to the natural evils outside us: such as excessive heat or cold, rain, hail, storms, thunder, lightning, pestilence, famine; in fine, all the inclemencies of the air and the turmoil of the elements. Whatever kind of season God may send us we should be content with, never yielding to impatience or anger, as people are wont to do when the weather is opposed to their wishes. Hence we should never speak of a bad or foul day, or use other similar expressions, which manifest a want of submission and a discontent of mind. It is our duty to accept the weather as it is, because it is God's work, and to say with the three young men in the Babylonian furnace: 'O ye frost and cold, ye clouds and lightnings, bless the Lord, praise and exalt Him above all for ever' (*Dan.* iii). These inanimate creatures are always praising and blessing God by their obedience and conformity to His holy will. And we ought never to cease from glorifying Him in the same manner. In order to suppress all mutinous feelings and intemperate words, let us remember that if the actual state of the weather is a trial to us, it may be an advantage to others; if it hinders our designs, it may help those of our neighbours; if it is unfavourable for the part, it may be favourable for the whole; that at all events it is good for the glory of God, since it is in accordance with His will and good-pleasure." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Conn. et Am. de N. S. J.-C.*, I, iii, c. viii.



## CHAPTER III

### ON ABANDONMENT IN EXTERNAL GOODS AND EVILS

#### ARTICLE I.—PROSPERITY AND ADVERSITY

**W**E shall begin with what is most general, viz., adversity or prosperity for ourselves and those dear to us, our families, communities, etc.

We can put adversity and prosperity to good use or to bad, according as we wish to be found amongst the wise men or with the fools. Is it God's will that we should have alternations of joy and sorrow? Or does He intend to keep us almost perpetually on the cross? We cannot tell. Consequently, our best wisdom is to establish ourselves in a holy indifference, to wait with tranquillity on the divine good-pleasure, to accept its ordinances with loving confidence, and to profit by them to the very best of our power. Viewed in the light of a vivid faith, prosperity will appear to us as a perpetual smile on the face of Providence, and therefore we shall open our hearts wide to feelings of gratitude, love, and confidence in our heavenly Father. Every additional proof of His affection will cause words of joyous thanksgiving to well from our lips. Owing to His munificence, we shall be in a position to assist our less fortunate brethren and so to induce them to join us in blessing the Author of all good. But, alas! St. Francis de Sales had very good reason, indeed, to say: "Prosperity has attractions which charm the senses and lull the reason to sleep. It imperceptibly brings about in us such a change of disposition that we begin to attach ourselves to the gifts and to forget the Giver."<sup>1</sup> In the same way, it makes us descend, almost without our advertence, to the lower level of a less austere life, where we seek our ease in the paths of relaxation. Hence we are sometimes astonished to see those who make profession of being

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<sup>1</sup> *Esprit de S. Fr. de Sales*, P. x, 2.

nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ eagerly desirous of prosperity, full of zeal in the pursuit of earthly goods to which they attach themselves with fervour, prompt in having recourse to God only when the thorns of adversity pierce them, and impatient to obtain deliverance therefrom. "And nevertheless the Gospel makes Christian beatitude to consist in poverty, contempt, affliction, tears, and persecution. Even philosophy teaches us that prosperity is the stepmother of true virtue, which is adversity's natural daughter." Too often, therefore, lasting prosperity is but a snare. And recalling that it had no such lasting smiles for Our Lord and His saints, the truly spiritual soul will end by becoming troubled about it. She would prefer to experience less gladness in this world. The one reflection that reassures her is that she is in the hands of God, Who will not permit her to come to harm.

Adversity opens to us a surer way. As our firm Friend, full of solicitude for our happiness, Almighty God removes us from the dangers of prosperity and employs the sword of adversity to cut out of our hearts those earthly affections which dispute there the sovereignty of His holy love. At one time by privation, at another by suffering, He detaches us swiftly and surely from the fascination of pleasure, withdrawing our minds and hearts from the things of this miserable earth and elevating them to the hope of the everlasting bliss of heaven. Yes, adversity is beyond a doubt the best school of detachment. But it is also an anticipated purgatory, not so terrible indeed as the other, but still very efficacious; for God never punishes the same offence twice. When He has purified us in the crucible of tribulation, as gold in the furnace, He shall find us worthy of Himself and receive us as victims for the holocaust.

Adversity is a veritable gold-mine whence we may extract the noblest virtues and an unlimited wealth of merits. One day Father Natalis asked St. Ignatius: "What is the shortest and surest path to perfection and paradise?" "The endurance of many great adversities

for the love of Jesus Christ," answered the Saint. A single great adversity puts us on the road to heaven, but a succession of them brings us far and quickly on our way. For men of faith, according to Alvarez, "sufferings are the post-horses which God sends to carry us to Him speedily. Or rather they are a ladder which He offers us so that we may mount thereby to the topmost heights of virtue. . . . We can imagine the grief of a farmer when a hail-storm has ruined his vineyard. But suppose it was a hail of gold, would his distress be still reasonable? Now, the contempt and other afflictions which fall upon us like showers of hailstones are really showers of gold for the soul that is truly patient. What she gains is infinitely more valuable than what she has lost. Heaven is the home of the tempted, the afflicted, and the despised." <sup>2</sup>

Adversity is also the shortest road to sanctity. According to St. Catherine of Genoa, contempt, poverty, sickness, temptation, and all such trials are indispensable to us if we desire to subdue thoroughly our vicious inclinations and unruly passions. And they are the means Our Lord employs to prepare us for union with God. In the opinion of St. Ignatius, "there can be nothing so well calculated to produce and preserve in us the love of God as the wood of the cross." St. Alphonsus tells us that "the science of the saints consists in suffering constantly for Jesus Christ: this is a short-cut to sanctification." <sup>3</sup> The wonderful favours Our Lord has bestowed upon His friends, the extraordinary actions which have made them famous, appear to us possibly as the most important facts in their lives. But that would be a mistaken view. We should pay more particular attention to the aridities, the infirmities, the desolations, the persecutions, the tribulations of all kinds which God showered upon them, and their unalterable patience under a prolonged martyrdom; for it was these things that raised them to sanctity.

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<sup>2</sup> Du Pont, *Vie du P. Bal. Alv.*, cc. xl et xli.

<sup>3</sup> *Am. env.*, c. i.

Generous lovers of their Divine Master, they wished to be like Him, poor, afflicted, and despised. God the Father caused them to be crucified with His own dearly-beloved Son. The most loving amongst them have been subjected to the severest trials. And it is generally towards the end of their lives, during the period of their highest perfection, that they have suffered the most.

There is not one amongst the saints that has not lived on the cross, not one that has not been content to suffer thereon with his adorable Master. All of them, like our holy father, St. Benedict, "preferred the scorn of men to their praises, and desired rather to be exhausted with labour than enriched with the favours of this world."<sup>4</sup> Blessed Henry Suso, having been given a short and, with him, extremely rare respite from his continual trials, complained thus of it to the religieuses who were his spiritual daughters: "I fear I am going to the bad, because for almost four weeks now I have had nothing to endure from anybody. I am very much afraid God has forsaken me." Scarcely had he spoken these words when someone came with the news that two powerful persecutors of his had sworn to destroy him. He experienced at first an emotion of fear. "I should like to know how I have deserved to be slain." "It is on account of the conversions you have made." "Then God be praised," he replied; and returning to the convent grille, exclaimed joyously: "Courage, my daughters! God has me still in His thoughts, He has not yet forgotten me."<sup>5</sup> *We* say in our trials: "Enough, my God, enough!" But the Blessed Marie-Madeleine Postel, on the contrary, never ceased repeating: "Still more, Lord, still more! Come to me, beloved cross, that I may embrace thee. Be Thou for ever blest, O my God, Who dost humble me only for the purpose of exalting me." And when the trial came, she would cry: "Yet another cross! Let us thank the good God Who loves us so

<sup>4</sup> St. Greg. M. *Vita St. Ben.*, c. ii.

<sup>5</sup> *Exemp.*, c. xxx.

dearly. If He sends us tribulation it is in order that He may reward us the more." <sup>6</sup> St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, during a very painful crisis, wrote to her sister as follows : " What an immense love Jesus must have for us to send us so great an affliction ! Eternity will not be long enough to thank Him for it. He is bestowing on us the same kind of favours that He lavished on the greatest saints. Suffering and humiliation are the only way to sanctity. This trial which has befallen us is a gold-mine to be exploited. Let us offer our sufferings to Jesus for the salvation of souls." <sup>7</sup>

Hence we must conclude with St. Alphonsus : " Certain people imagine that they are specially beloved by God when everything goes well with them and they have nothing to suffer. Such persons labour under an illusion : for it is by adversity, not by prosperity, God proves the fidelity of His servants, and separates the wheat from the chaff. He who, in his affliction, humbles himself and resigns himself to the will of God is the wheat destined for the granaries of paradise ; whereas he who grows arrogant and impatient and abandons God is the chaff that will be burned in the fires of hell. If we carry our cross with patience we shall be saved ; if with impatience we shall be lost." <sup>8</sup> There were two men crucified by the side of Jesus. The same torments made a saint of the one and a reprobate of the other. Ah, if we could only carry our crosses, not merely with patience and resignation, but with love, confidence, and filial affection ! Two virtues, particularly, will help us thereto, namely, the spirit of faith and humility. Let us pay no heed at all to nature, which always murmurs against adversity, but let us suppress it entirely, so that we may keep God alone in view ; and then we shall soon be able to sing with the Psalmist : " I was dumb and I opened not my mouth, because Thou hast done it " (Ps. xxxviii, 10). The proud

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<sup>6</sup> *Vie de la Marie-Mad. cl Postel*, cc. xiii et xxx.

<sup>7</sup> *Lettres*, 3 et 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Am. env. J.C.*, c. i.

man finds it easy to convince himself that he has been treated unjustly, and God's ways when painful astonish and disconcert him. The humble man, on the contrary, penetrated with a poignant sense of his miseries and faults, will bless the Lord even in affliction. "I adore the equity of Thy judgments, O my God. Even in chastising me Thou dost show me favour, and I praise Thee for Thy mercies, because my punishment is far short of my deserts. Besides, I have need of suffering as a remedy for my ailments, and the tribulation Thou hast sent me corresponds exactly to my need."

## ARTICLE II.—CALAMITIES PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

It is our duty to conform ourselves to the will of God in public calamities, such as war, pestilence, famine, and all the other scourges of divine vengeance. We are obliged to do as much when the misfortune happens to fall upon ourselves personally or upon our friends. The great secret of attaining to such conformity consists in looking at all occurrences with the eyes of faith, adoring with a contrite and humble heart the judgments of the Most High, and, however heavy may be the trials that afflict us, persuading ourselves that Providence, infinitely wise and loving, would neither send nor permit them without knowing how to employ them as instruments for the conversion and salvation of peoples and individuals. "It is by this way of suffering that Providence conducts to heaven an immense multitude of souls who would have lost themselves on any other road. How many sinners, led back to God by the rough path of affliction, renounce their former vicious habits and die in the sentiments of a true repentance! How many Christians, who will one day occupy a glorious place in paradise, would have to endure the eternal torments of hell but for these salutary trials! That which we call a scourge and a chastisement

is often a signal grace, an extraordinary effort of mercy." " Let us but accustom ourselves to contemplate everything exclusively from the lofty standpoint of faith, and then nothing that happens in this world will scandalise us, nothing will disturb the peace of our souls and our loving submission to Providence. But let us enter now into some details, beginning with public calamities.

I.—It is easy to recognise the hand of Providence in pestilences, famines, inundations, tempests, and other such calamities, because the inanimate elements obey the divine authority without the least resistance. But how can it be seen in persecution carried on by the malice of Satan or in war with its fury? Nevertheless, even there Providence has its designs, as we have pointed out already. Beyond human agents, whether good or evil, behind the very demons themselves, we shall find the Supreme Arbiter, the First Cause Who leads them on, although perhaps they have no suspicion of it, and without Whom they can do nothing. The policy of princes, the orders of commanders, the obedience of soldiers, the dark designs of persecutors, the execution of these designs by subordinates, the ruin and misery resulting therefrom: all has been foreseen even to the smallest detail, all has been arranged and decreed in the councils of Divine Providence. Thus the malice of men and the holiness of God are combined in a strange collaboration. The Infinitely Holy cannot cease to hate evil. He tolerates it, nevertheless, in order not to deprive man of the use of his liberty. But His justice will claim its imprescriptible rights and hold all to a strict account at the proper moment: nations and families always in this world, because for them there is no eternity; but individual men either here or hereafter. In the meantime God wills, for the attainment of His purposes, to make use of the malice and sins of men, as of their virtues and good works. So that the very disorders produced by

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<sup>9</sup> Rodriguez, *Perf. chrét.*, 8<sup>e</sup> tr., c. xxii.

human agents contribute to the order which Providence has designed.

On the side of men there may be much that is blame-worthy. God will be their Judge. But on the side of Providence "everything is just, everything is wise, everything right and good, everything directed to a laudable end, everything brought to a final result which is always absolutely and infinitely amiable. Nero was a monster, still he made martyrs. Diocletian carried the rage of persecution to its uttermost limits, but thereby he prepared for the reaction, and for the triumph of Constantine. Arius was a demon incarnate who would rob Jesus Christ of His Divinity, but it is to his impious efforts we owe the Church's definitions on this subject. The Barbarians flung themselves upon the old world and deluged it with blood, but gave rise to a new race well disposed for Christianity. The crusades seemed a failure because they did not result in the rescue of Jerusalem, but they were the means of saving Europe. The French Revolution turned everything upside down, but it forced society in self-defence to a renewal of life and vigour." <sup>10</sup>

In the persecution of the present time it is evident that Satan has been unchained and that he has received permission to sift the just. "Wherefore this triumph of the impious? Wherefore this apparent defeat of the Church? Wherefore this perversion of the masses? Wherefore these governments that ruin the peoples? Wherefore this cowardice, this lukewarmness of persons who are considered religious? Wherefore, in a word, this dominion of evil over good?" <sup>11</sup>

Wherefore? It is because God respects that liberty of ours which is the condition for merit and demerit. He gives men their way. But when He judges the time opportune to confound the sinners, to awaken the slumberers, to stir up the tepid, and to defend the just, He will bring a universal war upon the guilty world.

<sup>10</sup> Desurmont, *Prov.*, 1<sup>re</sup> P., c. viii.

<sup>11</sup> *Idem.*, *op. cit.*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. ii.



The scourge appears : there is an impressive silence ; the clamour of politics is hushed ; faith revives ; the churches are filled as before. God had been forgotten. People remember now that He is the Master of all events. They cannot help seeing it. And the men who have let loose the tempest do not know either how to direct it or how to save themselves from its fury. But although God postpones to an opportune time the full vindication of His justice against them, He will meanwhile avail Himself of the foresight of some and the improvidence of others, of their different mechanical contrivances, their skilfully devised plans, their courage, their brilliant actions, their faults, their malice and even their crimes. He turns everything to account for the purpose of chastising nations, families, and individuals. However, He will not wield the scourge more than is necessary for the attainment of His ends. He is ready to put aside His anger as soon as the offenders give proof of sincere conversion. But should the good dispositions excited by the first lashes disappear, if sinners are obstinate in keeping their eyes closed to the light and their hearts to repentance, ought we to feel surprised that the war is prolonged and perhaps reinforced by many other scourges ? Would it be better to allow the nations, persevering in their fatal forgetfulness of the divine laws, to continue to run towards the abyss, and to let immortal souls rush headlong to perdition ?

Yet how explain such severity in a God so good ? Astonishment at the severity of God's temporal chastisements can only come from ignorance of the way in which His rights are ignored and His love slighted, of the multitude of His graces and the excess of our malice, of the joys of a blissful eternity and the everlasting torments of hell. It is precisely because He is so infinitely good that our heavenly Father loves us without weakness, and as is necessary for our eternal happiness. All worldly prosperity would be but the cruellest of scourges if it tended to lull souls to sleep in apathy and forgetfulness, and if the re-awakening should take place only at the

bottom of the abyss. On the other hand, the most terrible calamities, even though they continued for a long series of years, are very insignificant when compared with never-ending torments; nay, they will be a great mercy on the part of God and a great happiness for us if, by suffering them with patience, we can so disarm His justice, escape hell, and recover our rights to heaven. Such is the design of our heavenly Father in visiting us with His chastisements. He does not like to inflict pain. If we compel Him to do so by forgetfulness of our duties and of our true interests, we alone are to blame. And we are much more to blame if we refuse to submit to His correction. After all, it cannot be said of Him that He is over-hasty in punishment. To avoid the necessity of it, He threatens for long, and exercises so much patience that the weak take scandal and the wicked blaspheme. The time will come, however, when it will be necessary for Him to apply Himself, as Supreme Governor, to re-establish order, and, as Father and Saviour of souls, to lead them back into the paths of salvation by rigorous means, since by their malice they persist in rendering gentler methods ineffectual.

The scourges of God come as trials to some, as chastisements to others; but they bring the grace of a spiritual revival to every soul of good will. Happy he who can comprehend them and put them to profit! "Such disasters," writes Caussade, "are for numbers but so many means to predestination. Yet it must be admitted that for others they can be occasions of ruin. However, that will be only through their own fault, and their most grievous fault. For, what can be more reasonable, and in one sense more easy, than to make a virtue of necessity? Why should we vainly and criminally resist the paternal hand of God Who chastises only in order to detach our hearts from the miserable goods of this world? His anger has its source in mercy. He smites us only for the purpose of withdrawing us from sin and saving us. As a wise surgeon, He cuts away the putrid flesh, even to the

quick, so as to preserve life and health in the rest of the body.”<sup>12</sup>

What are we to do when we find ourselves encompassed with calamities? First, we must “humble ourselves beneath the mighty hand of God” (I *Pet.* v, 6), and abandon ourselves to His Providence with filial submission, in the intimate assurance that it is our heavenly Father Who has arranged everything, that His impenetrable designs have for their principle the love of souls, and that He will know how to draw good out of the most disconcerting occurrences. As for that which concerns us personally, we must remember we are in the hands of Almighty Wisdom. If He wills to save us, it is as easy for Him to do so when dangers of every kind surround us as when no danger threatens; and should it be His will to try us, may His holy name be for ever blest! Secondly, we must discharge all our particular duties as perfectly as possible, and devote ourselves with zeal to the common good, according to times and circumstances, and in so far as our situation permits. “When a storm breaks at sea—well, it is a storm. The sailor resigns himself to the inevitable, and sets to work. Let us imitate his example. Let us not participate in the agitation of the restless billows that buffet us, but hold fast to the rock of Providence, crying out: O my God, I adore Thee! I praise Thee! I accept this trial from Thy hands; I endure the tempest, and I preserve my soul in peace.”<sup>13</sup>

In the third place, we must pray, pray repeatedly, pray constantly. We must ask, seek, knock, supplicate. We must importune the Lord to put a speedy end to the calamity, if such be His good-pleasure; but we must ask without any condition that as few souls as possible may perish in the disturbance, that the multitudes may come back to Him with hearts contrite and humbled, that the number of saints may be multiplied, that the Church may

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<sup>12</sup> *Abandon*, I, iv, let. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Desurmont, *Prov.*, 2<sup>e</sup> P., c. xi.

be more loyally obeyed and the Divine Majesty less offended. And since "prayer is particularly efficacious when accompanied with fasting, and alms maketh us to find mercy" (*Tob. xii, 8-9*), the time of calamity is the most suitable of all times for renewing our fidelity to these Christian duties, and for adding to our obligatory sacrifices some voluntary mortifications, in order to appease the just anger of heaven. For public calamities are, in general, the punishment of sin, and their universality and magnitude are proportionate to the flood of iniquity that has provoked the divine wrath. The best thing we can do, therefore, is to labour with more zeal to sanctify our own lives, and to offer to our irritated Master, our dishonoured Father, redoubled love and fidelity for our own part, and a generous tribute of reparation and honourable amends for those near and dear to us and for the whole guilty world.

II.—We should follow practically the same line of conduct when the calamity falls upon ourselves, our families, or our communities. We should endeavour to recognise God in it, and God paternally occupied with the concerns of our souls. The death of a beloved friend appears to me disastrous. But perhaps if that friend had been allowed to live longer he would die in the state of sin. I may owe thirty or forty years of life to this very malady which I have supported with so little patience. The eternal salvation of my soul may have depended on the humiliation which has cost me so many tears. I should perhaps have been spiritually ruined had I not lost that money. Why, then, do we complain? God Himself has undertaken to conduct us to our destiny, and still we are full of anxiety! Oh, if we only better understood His loving designs for us, we would bless Him even when He treats us with seeming severity. Such filial abandonment would multiply our merits, establish us in peace, touch the heart of our heavenly Father, and would often be the best means of temporal success.

Two months after the birth of the Order of the

Visitation, St. Jane de Chantal became so ill that her death seemed inevitable. It was a great trial for the holy Bishop of Geneva, for he believed that this Institute was willed by God and destined to become a most prolific source of spiritual good. But he saw clearly that if the shepherdess succumbed the flock would be dispersed. Nevertheless, he had the courage to say: "God wills us to be content with having taken the first step, for He knows we have not strength enough to go the whole way." The Lord, however, only awaited this act of abandonment. He immediately restored the health of the holy foundress and preserved her in vigour for many years.<sup>14</sup> Extreme hardships in the beginning, difficulties in getting subjects, deaths, apostasies, schism, rebellion, poverty to the point of destitution, persecutions from without and annoyance from persons in authority: no kind of suffering was spared St. Alphonsus de' Liguori in the establishment of his Congregation. In the midst of the most violent tempests he prayed, he did all that was humanly possible, and desired nothing but the will of God. Now, it was God's design to make the holy founder a perfect model, and his Institute a nursery of saints. And therefore was it not fitting that the father or so illustrious a line should resemble the Divine Redeemer in being poor, humbled, and persecuted? <sup>15</sup>

One of our greatest trials is the loss of those near and dear to us. After the death of his mother, the gentle Bishop of Geneva wrote to St. Jane de Chantal as follows: "Should we not always and in everything adore this Supreme Providence whose ordinances are ever holy, good, and amiable? It has now been pleased to remove my dearest mother from this miserable world in order, as I confidently hope, to place her in paradise at the right hand of God. Let us acknowledge that the Lord is good and His mercies eternal. His will is always just, His decrees equitable, His good-pleasure holy, and His

<sup>14</sup> *Vie de St. Fr. de Sales*, I, v.

<sup>15</sup> *Berthe, St. Alph. de Lig.*, I, vi, c. ix.

ordinances most deserving of love." Being an affectionate son, this bereavement caused him a very poignant but tranquil sorrow. He would not dare manifest the least discontent, or even complain, because he knew God was the cause of his affliction. When his sister died, he said in a letter to St. Jane de Chantal, who was very much grieved by the sad event: "We must not merely allow God to strike us, we must allow Him to strike us where He pleases. It is our duty to leave Him this choice, for it is His right. . . . Lord Jesus, may Thy will be done with regard to father and mother and daughter, always and in everything, without any reserves, without 'ifs,' without 'buts,' without exceptions or limitations. Mind, I do not suggest that we must not sigh and pray for the preservation of our loved ones. But to say to God: 'Lord, leave this one and take that other'—anything like that, my daughter, we should never do. . . . You have four children, a father-in-law, a beloved brother, and in addition a spiritual father. They are all very dear to you, and rightly so, because such is the will of God. Now, suppose the Lord deprived you of them all, would you not still have enough in having Him? Is He not everything in your estimation? Though we should possess nothing but God, is He not quite sufficient for us?"<sup>16</sup> Moreover, what is death but a brief separation? The essential thing is by a virtuous life to secure a happy death and an eternal reunion in the home of our Father in heaven. And surely God knows better than anyone else the moment and the manner most favourable for the exit of ourselves and our dear ones.

"It is a pardonable weakness," writes St. Alphonsus, "to shed tears at the death of a beloved relative or friend. But to abandon oneself to the violence of grief is to be wanting in virtue, to be wanting in love for God. Good religious are far from being insensible to the loss of relatives and dearly beloved friends. But when an event

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<sup>16</sup> *Lettres*, 432 et 458.

of this kind happens they say : Such is the will of God. Then they go, resigned and calm, to pray for the souls of their dear ones. They multiply prayers and Communions in order to unite themselves more intimately with God and to console themselves with the pious hope of being one day reunited with their departed friends in heaven.”<sup>17</sup>

St. Bernard lost by death the Blessed Gerard, one of his brothers, and lamented him in the following spontaneous and beautiful threnody :

“ How long shall I dissemble? How long shall I endeavour to conceal within myself the fire which consumes my broken heart and devours my very vitals? A secret flame creeps forward more freely, and more cruelly rages. What have I to do with this Canticle of love, submerged as I am in an ocean of bitterness? The vehemence of my grief draws away my attention, and the anger of the Lord has withered my soul. For ‘ my heart hath forsaken me,’ since he is gone who used to leave me, in some sense, free for divine contemplation. But I have done violence to my feelings. I have striven to conceal my sorrow until now, afraid lest perhaps it should seem that faith had succumbed to natural affection. Therefore, whilst all others wept, I alone, with tearless eyes, followed the cruel bier, as you can yourselves bear witness. With tearless eyes I stood at the graveside until the last sad rites were all accomplished. Vested in my priestly robes, I pronounced with my own lips the usual prayers over the remains. With my own hands I sprinkled clay, according to our custom, over my beloved Gerard’s body, soon to be changed itself into clay. They that watched me were weeping, and they wondered why I did not weep myself, although he was less the object of universal compassion than was I, who had been bereaved of him. For surely harder than iron must the heart have been that would not melt to see me surviving Gerard.

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<sup>17</sup> *Vér. ép. de J.-C.*, xii, 2, vi.

“His death was a common calamity, but this was reckoned as nothing in comparison with the personal loss to me. I tried to resist my sorrow with all the force I could gather from faith, striving to suppress even those vain involuntary emotions, occasioned by what is, after all, but our natural destiny, the debt of our mortality, the necessity of our condition, the ordinance of the Mighty One, the judgment of the Just One, the scourge of the Terrible One. Such reflections led me to restrain myself constantly, then and to the present, from over-much weeping, whilst all the time I felt exceedingly sad and afflicted. For although I could control my tears, I had not the same power over my sorrow; but as it is written, ‘I was troubled and I spoke not.’ But pent-up grief strikes its roots the more deeply within, becoming the more bitter, as I suppose, from the fact that it is refused an outlet. My brethren, I have to acknowledge myself vanquished. I must now give vent to my interior anguish. I must exhibit my distress to the eyes of my children, that, realising its magnitude, they may think more kindly thoughts of my affliction and may more sweetly console me.

“You know, O my children, you know how reasonable is my sorrow, how worthy of tears is the loss I have sustained. For you understand how faithful a companion has been taken from my side ‘in the way in which I was walking.’ You know what was his attentiveness to duty, his diligence at work, his sweetness and amiability of character. Who was so indispensable to me? By whom was I so much beloved? He was my brother by blood, but more my brother by religious profession. Oh, pity my lot, you to whom these things are known! I was weak in body, and he supported me. I was pusillanimous, and he encouraged me. I was slothful and negligent, and he spurred me on. I was improvident and forgetful, and he acted as my monitor. Oh, whither hast thou been taken from me? Why hast thou been torn from my arms, ‘a man of one mind,’ ‘a man according to my heart’? We have loved each other in life, how then is it that we are



separated in death? O most cruel divorce, which only death could have power to cause! For when in life wouldst thou have so deserted me? Yes, it is unmistakably the work of death, this most woeful separation. For what but death, that enemy of all things sweet, would not have spared the sweet bond of our mutual love?

“Hence it were far better for me to have lost my life than thy company, O my brother, who wast the earnest stimulator of my studies in the Lord, my faithful helper, and my prudent counsellor. Why, I ask, have we been so united in brotherly love? Or, so united, why so parted? O most mournful lot! But it is my fate that is pitiable, not his. For thou, sweet brother, if separated from thy dear ones, art now united to others still more dear. But what consolation remains to wretched me, after losing thee, my only comfort? Our bodily companionship was a source of enjoyment to both of us, on account of the conformity of our wills and sentiments, but I alone have suffered from the separation. The enjoyment was common, but I am left the monopoly of the sadness and the sorrow. ‘Wrath hath come upon me’; ‘wrath is strong over me.’ Sweet was the presence of each to other, sweet our companionship, sweet our daily intercourse. But whilst I have lost the happiness of us both, thou hast only exchanged it for better.

“Gush forth, gush forth now, my tears, for he is gone, whose presence heretofore prevented your flowing, by excluding the cause. Open, ye fountains of my unhappy head, and pour yourselves out in rivers of water, if perchance you may thus suffice to wash away the soil of my sins, whereby I have called down upon me the just anger of heaven. When my tears shall have appeased and consoled the Lord, then, perhaps, I may deserve that He also should grant me a little consolation. But He will do this only on condition that I cease not from weeping, for it is only those who mourn that He has promised shall be comforted. Wherefore, be indulgent towards me, all you that are holy, and do you that are spiritual bear with me

in my lamentation in the spirit of mildness. Let natural affection rather than custom be considered in judging my sorrow.

“ My soul cleaved to his. We two were made one, less by the ties of flesh and blood than by sameness of sentiment. Connected by the bond of consanguinity, we werè still more closely united by our spiritual relationship, by the conformity of our minds, and the harmony of our wills. As we were thus but ‘ one heart and one soul,’ the sword of death pierced this common soul of him and me, and, dividing it in two, placed one part in heaven, and left the other lying prostrate in the mire of the earth. I, dearest brethren, I am that wretched part, cast prone upon the ground, despoiled of half of myself, and that the more excellent. And will you now say to me ‘ weep not ’? My very vitals have been torn out, and shall it be said to me, ‘ do not grieve ’? But I do grieve; oh, yes, I grieve, because ‘ my strength is not the strength of stones, nor is my flesh of brass.’ I grieve, most assuredly, and I am in pain, ‘ and my sorrow is continually before me.’ Certainly, He Who uses the scourge cannot reproach me with hardness and insensibility, as He did them of whom the Prophet complained, saying, ‘ Thou hast struck them and they have not grieved.’ I have confessed my sorrow and I have not denied it. You may call it carnal. I do not deny that it is human, any more than I deny that I am a man. If this does not content you, I will even allow it to be carnal, for ‘ I am carnal, sold under sin,’ devoted to death, liable to sufferings and sorrows. I am not, I acknowledge, insensible to pain. The thought of death coming to me or mine, makes me shudder with horror. And Gerard was mine, surely mine. How could he be other than mine, who was my brother in blood, my son in religion, my father in solicitude, my consort in spirit, my bosom friend in love? He has abandoned me now, and I feel as if I were wounded, aye, wounded unto death.

“ Forgive me, my children. Rather, because you are my

children, compassionate your poor father's distress. 'Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends,' who know how heavily the hand of the Lord has been laid upon me for my faults. With the rod of His indignation He has stricken me, justly, indeed, according to my deserts, but severely, considering my weakness. Surely no one who understands what Gerard was to me, will say it is a light punishment for me to be condemned to live without him. Yet, 'I will not contradict the words of the Holy One.' I do not find fault with the judgment, by which each of us has received what we severally deserved, he the crown, and I the cross. Or shall it be said that I resist the judgment because I feel the pain? But to smart under the lash is not the same thing as to rebel against authority, for the former is but human, whilst the latter is an act of impiety.

"Surely I may weep from pain since Jesus wept from compassion. For at the grave of Lazarus He certainly did not reprove the mourners nor command them to desist; but, on the contrary, He united His own tears with theirs. 'And Jesus wept,' says the Evangelist. Those tears of His, most assuredly, betrayed no want of confidence, but only testified to the reality of His Human Nature. For He immediately called upon the dead man, in order to show that faith suffers no loss from the affection of sorrow.

"So neither is my weeping a sign of a weak faith, but only an indication of my condition. From the fact that I cry out from pain on being smitten, it must not be supposed that I blame Him Who smites me. I only appeal to His compassion, and endeavour as best I can to soften His severity. Hence, though my words are full of grief, they are yet free from murmuring. Have I not acknowledged the perfection of His justice Who, by one compendious sentence, assigned to Gerard the reward and to me the chastisement due to our respective merits? And still I say, the 'sweet and righteous Lord' has done well by us both. 'Mercy and judgment I will sing to Thee, O Lord.' Let the mercy, which Thou hast shown

to Thy servant Gerard, sing to Thee. And let the judgment, under which I groan, sing to Thee also. In the one Thou shalt be praised for Thy goodness, in the other for Thy justice. Or is there praise for goodness only? Yea, and for justice as well. 'Thou art just, O Lord, and Thy judgment right'. Gerard Thou gavest, Gerard Thou hast taken away; and if we lament his removal, we do not forget that he was but a loan. So we feel thankful that we were accounted worthy to have him even for a while. And our unwillingness to lose him is proportionate to the need which we had of him.

"But I am now compelled to put an end to my words by the flow of my tears. Do Thou, O Lord, I implore Thee, put an end and a limit to them."<sup>18</sup>

#### ARTICLE III.—RICHES AND POVERTY

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (*Matt.* v, 3). "Miserable, therefore, are the rich in spirit," adds St. Francis de Sales, "for theirs are the torments of hell. He is rich in spirit who either has his riches in his spirit, or his spirit in his riches. And consequently the man who is poor in spirit is he who has neither riches in his spirit, nor his spirit in riches. The halcyons build their nests at the edge of the sea and in the shape of a ball. They leave on top of the nests a small opening, but otherwise make them so firm and impenetrable that even when caught by the waves they never admit any water, but always float secure on the surface, remaining in the sea and on the sea, but masters of the sea. Such, my dear Philothea, ought your heart to be: open only on the side of heaven, impenetrably closed to all affection for riches and earthly things. If you should happen to possess riches, keep your heart free from attachment to them; let it hold itself high above

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<sup>18</sup> *Ser. in Cant.*, xxvi.

them, so that in the midst of riches it may be without riches and master of its riches. No, never bury your immortal spirit in earthly goods. Let it rise superior to them; let it be not in them but over them.”<sup>19</sup> The Saint is speaking here of poverty in affection. This comprises an infinity of degrees, from simple resignation in destitution, or detachment in possession, up to the passionate love of St. Francis of Assisi for his Lady Poverty. When carried to a high degree of perfection, it is the beatitude praised by Our Lord. We should pray without any condition for this poverty in affection, and pursue it assiduously, whether we actually possess riches or not. It is an object we are obliged to attain. For, according to the just remark of St. Bernard, “it is not poverty that is accounted a virtue, but the love of poverty.”<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, riches and poverty in effect constitute one of the principal objects of holy abandonment.

Without a certain amount of temporal possessions a monastery would be unable to exist, to carry on its good works, or to make moderate provision for the future. When the temporalities are in a satisfactory state, our minds are not so much oppressed with anxiety, but are freer to devote themselves entirely to things spiritual. If God has appointed us the stewards and dispensers of His goods, we shall be able to exercise a fruitful apostolate, because in succouring our neighbour in his bodily needs we shall have an opportunity of winning his soul to grace. At the same time we shall have the pleasure of making others happy, for “it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive” (*Acts* xx, 35). St. Francis de Sales, therefore, had reason to say, in this sense, that “to be rich in effect and poor in affection is the great privilege of the Christian, since by this means he can have the advantages of wealth for the present life and the merit of poverty for the life to come.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Vie dévote*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. xiv.

<sup>20</sup> *Lettre*, 100.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

But according to the teaching of St. Bonaventure, "an abundance of temporalities is a sort of bird-lime that holds down the soul and hinders her flight to God."<sup>22</sup> Very true, for it exposes religious to the danger of applying with excessive solicitude to earthly things, of attaching their hearts to them, of relaxing more or less their austerity of life, of allowing themselves to seek after bodily comforts, and of losing the fervour of their love for God. Upon seculars it brings temptations more terrible still, inasmuch as money facilitates a life of worldliness and dissipation. Wealth is very apt to engender self-esteem, the desire of honours, pride and ambition. In short, it is written that the love of riches is the root of all evil, and that the rich shall find it extremely hard to enter the kingdom of heaven; they at least who are rich only for themselves and not according to God, and he above all who fares sumptuously every day whilst Lazarus starves on his doorstep.

On the other hand, destitution, burdening the mind, as it must, with solitudes and preoccupations, does not leave us at liberty to devote ourselves entirely to God alone. It lays the weak in faith open to the danger of discouragement, murmuring, even of rebellion. And if it is lasting and extreme it will render existence almost impossible.

Between abundance and destitution there is a mean which the Apostle accounted great riches, viz., godliness with a sufficiency to sustain life, or that moderation of desire which is content with food and clothing. Somebody spoke to St. Francis de Sales about the poverty of his see. "But, after all," replied the holy Bishop, "so long as we have enough to feed and clothe ourselves decently, should we not be satisfied? Whatever goes beyond these requirements is evil, superfluous, and a cause of worry. Those who possess richer revenues must support larger establishments. It is not for themselves,

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<sup>22</sup> St. Alph., *Am. de J.-C.*, x, 2.

therefore, they possess them, but for their attendants who, often without doing anything to earn their living, devour the patrimony of the Crucified. He who has less means has also less to account for, and less anxiety about deciding how it should be expended: for the King of Glory requires to be served and honoured with judgment. Bishops with large revenues sometimes dispense so much that at the end of the year they have no more than I, and perhaps have run into debt. As for me, I consider myself extremely rich when I owe nothing. Besides, my diocese is as valuable to me as the archiepiscopal see of Toledo, because it is worth to me either heaven or hell." <sup>23</sup>

The same holy Doctor says, further: "We ought to live in this world as if our spirits were in paradise and our bodies in the tomb. Our true blessedness here below consists in being content with the minimum that suffices. Who would not love poverty which Our Lord loved so much, which He made His faithful companion during His whole life? To learn to be satisfied with little we have but to consider those whose poverty is greater than ours, for we are only poor comparatively. If we desire no more than what is necessary, we shall hardly ever be really poor; and if we wish to have all that passion covets we shall never be rich. Therefore, the secret of becoming rich in a short time and with little effort is to moderate our desires: we should imitate the sculptor who produces his works by subtraction, not the painter who proceeds by addition." <sup>24</sup>

Consequently, we must exercise ourselves in holy abandonment. For, on the one hand, in order to avoid destitution and to obtain a competency, hard work, the spirit of order and economy, even virtue itself will not suffice us; for God remains always Master of His gifts; He bestows them or refuses them at His pleasure. On the other hand, should we sanctify destitution or should we make a

<sup>23</sup> *Esprit*, 14<sup>e</sup> P., xiv et xxxiv.

<sup>24</sup> Hamon, *Vie de S. Fr. de Sales*, vii, 14.

good use of wealth? We cannot tell. God alone can see the future. Our wisest course, then, is to leave ourselves entirely in His hands, praying with the Wise Man: "Lord, give me neither riches nor beggary; give me only the necessities of life: lest perhaps, being filled, I should be tempted to deny and say: Who is the Lord? Or being compelled by poverty, I should steal" (*Prov.* xxx, 8-9).

Whether God gives us riches, a sufficiency, or want, there shall always be a combination of His good-pleasure and His signified will. Consequently, we shall have the obligation to unite obedience to our abandonment.

If God has bestowed temporal goods upon us in liberal measure, we must be very careful to observe the Apostle's precept to the rich of this world. That is to say, we must not elevate ourselves in thought or put our trust in uncertain riches, we must willingly succour the needy and love to share our means with others less favoured, and we must strive to amass treasures of good works so as to establish "a solid foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on the true life" (*I Tim.* vi, 17-19). In the meantime, let us endeavour, according to the counsel of St. Francis de Sales, "to embrace with our hearts both riches and poverty at once, to have a great solicitude and at the same time a great contempt for temporal things": a solicitude greater than that which worldlings entertain for their possessions, because they work for themselves, whilst we work for God; yet a sweet, peaceful, and tranquil solicitude like the sentiment of duty whence it proceeds. God wills us to act in this way from love to Him. To this solicitude we must unite a contempt of earthly goods. In order to prevent our solicitude from degenerating into avarice, we must be on our guard against continuous, ardent and disquieting desires for the goods we have not yet obtained, against being so concerned about those we actually possess that they unduly occupy our thoughts and affections and torture us with the fear of losing them, and against immoderate distress when we happen to be deprived of them.



"Nothing so clearly proves our affection for what we have lost," writes St. Francis de Sales, "as the affliction we feel at the loss of it." <sup>25</sup>

"When events occur which impoverish us, to a greater or lesser degree, such as tempests, conflagrations, inundations, droughts, robberies, lawsuits, etc., Oh, then is the time to practise poverty by accepting with sweetness this diminution of our means and by accommodating ourselves with patience and constancy to the new circumstances arising from our having less to live on. And however rich one may be, it is easy to be often in need of something. My dear Philothea, preserve your soul in peace when such accidents occur; accept them courageously and suffer cheerfully. If, therefore, you should lack the necessary medicines in your sickness, or a fire during the cold of winter, or even food and clothing, say: 'My God, Thou art all sufficient for me,' and so remain in peace." <sup>26</sup>

"If you desire to be really poor, become poor also in spirit, change necessity into a virtue and make the very most of this precious stone of poverty. Although its splendour is not manifest in this world, it is nevertheless extremely rich and beautiful. Have patience: you are in good company: Our Lord, Our Lady, the Apostles, all the Saints have been poor. And though they could have acquired riches, they disdained to do so. . . . Embrace poverty, then, as the beloved friend of Jesus Christ. For He was born in poverty, He lived and died in poverty, and kept it near Him as a faithful companion throughout His whole life." <sup>27</sup>

When the Blessed Marie-Madeleine Postel saw herself and her little community obliged to live in a stable, she was transported with holy joy. "Oh, yes, my daughters," she exclaimed, "I am indeed very happy. For now we are more like Our Lord, Who at His birth was given the

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<sup>25</sup> *Vie dévote*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., cc. xiv et xv.

<sup>26</sup> *Id. op. cit.*, c. xv.

<sup>27</sup> *Id. op. cit.*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. xvi.

hospitality, not of a royal palace or a splendid mansion, but of the poor manger of Bethlehem." Later on, she said: "I fear riches for communities. Let us desire no more than what is strictly necessary, and even that we must acquire by the labour of our hands. Work as if you wanted to become rich, but pray and desire to be left in your poverty. Poverty and humility must be the foundation of the Institute which God has called me to establish. And the day it loses the spirit of poverty shall be the day of its downfall." <sup>28</sup>

St. Joseph is an admirable model of abandonment in destitution. "God willed that he should remain always poor, which is one of the greatest trials that can befall us. But the Saint submitted to it lovingly, and during his whole life. And his poverty was a despised, scorned, destitute poverty. The voluntary poverty of which religious make profession is very amiable: inasmuch as it does not forbid them the use of necessities; it only deprives them of what is superfluous. But the poverty of St. Joseph, of Our Lord, and of Our Lady, was something very different. For although it was voluntary, in the sense that the holy Carpenter loved it dearly, it was also abject, scorned, and despised. For all his neighbours regarded the Saint as a poor artisan, who doubtless could not prevent his little Family from often suffering the want of necessities, notwithstanding that he worked his hardest, and with unparalleled love, for their support. But having done what he could, he submitted humbly to the will of God, in the continuation of his poverty and abjection, without letting himself be vanquished or disturbed by any interior disgust, which no doubt made frequent attacks upon him." <sup>29</sup>

"Therefore, you must not complain of your poverty, my dear Philothea, if you desire to imitate these glorious examples. For one only complains of what displeases. And if poverty is displeasing to you, then you are no longer

<sup>28</sup> *Vie de la Bse. Marie-Madeleine Postel*, cc. x et xviii.

<sup>29</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Entret.*, xix.

poor but rather rich in spirit. And do not be cast down if you should not be succoured according to your desire : to wish to be poor, yet to be unwilling to bear with inconvenience, what is this but to desire at once the honour of poverty and the advantages of wealth ?” <sup>30</sup>

#### ARTICLE IV.—HOUSE AND COMMUNITY

I.—A religious becomes attached to his house as a child to the home of his parents. So long as this affection remains submissive to the divine good-pleasure, nothing can be more legitimate and worthy of commendation. The monastery is “a garden enclosed” where God shelters us from the dangers of the world, where He vouchsafes to live with us in delightful intimacy. If it is not yet paradise, neither is it Egypt. It is rather the Land of Promise, overflowing with milk and honey. The religious is always under the same roof with Our Lord, and within a few feet of His tabernacle spends several hours of each day, as sweet as they are holy, celebrating or assisting at the Sacred Mysteries, chanting the praises of God, nourishing his soul with the solid bread of prayer or spiritual reading. It is there we are initiated into the monastic observances, formed to the interior life, exercised in the struggles for sanctity. Thanks to the rule and the firmness of the superiors who support us, and to the example of our brethren who help us along, it has been possible for us to hasten our steps and to make some little progress on our path. These blessed abodes, so constantly visited by God’s abounding grace, have been the happy witnesses of our holiest joys, of our combats, and of our trials. It is there we have promised to live and die. It is from there our souls hope to take their flight to heaven, whilst our bodies, the companions of their toil, shall be laid amongst the bones of our fathers to wait in

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<sup>30</sup> *Id. Vie dévote*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. xvi.

peace for a glorious resurrection. However, this attachment to our monastery, perfectly lawful as it is, should be subordinated to the divine good-pleasure. For God remains always the Supreme Arbiter of our destinies. He can dispose of us by the way of obedience, or He may permit the malice of persecutors to have its way with us.

Assuredly, we ought to do everything that depends upon us to preserve the stability we have vowed. But should it please God to exile us from our beloved monastery, is not He the Master, infinitely wise and good? Must we not see the hand of Divine Providence, here as elsewhere, directing the actions of men? And, consequently, shall we dare resist His sovereign will, instead of submitting with loving confidence? This earth is but a place through which we pass on our pilgrimage, heaven is the city of our seeking, our lasting home. The essential thing for us is to reach that home; but whether we arrive there from exile or from the fatherland is a matter of little importance. So long as God wills us to remain in our monastery, there for us is the path to paradise, a path to which none other can be compared. But if Providence sends us elsewhere, in whatever place it is pleased to have us, there henceforth shall be our hope of salvation, for it is by obedience we must enter the kingdom of heaven. There is something, however, infinitely preferable to the protecting walls of our monastery: the religious life we live there. And should it be necessary for us to resign ourselves to banishment in order to preserve that life, let us bless God Who, even at such a cost, wills to continue us in the possession of so great a good. After all, would it be a very heroic sacrifice? Assured of having in exile the same observances, the same community, the same superiors as in our original monastery, we should be much less deserving of pity than so many other religious who are unable in a strange land to apply themselves to their accustomed occupations and exercises, than so many others, especially, who are obliged to return to the world

and so lose all the precious advantages of the religious life. For us monks, formed to the life of the cloister, this would be the worst of all misfortunes. We should attempt even the impossible to escape it. In the case where obedience disposes of us, according to the custom of our Order, by sending us to establish a new foundation, a refuge, etc., the fervent religious will look only to God and his own soul, and will courageously bow to the divine good-pleasure. Unless his conscience imposes it as a duty, he will even avoid making respectful and filial representations. As soon as God has spoken by the mouth of the superior, he submits confidently and without hesitation, with no thought except to conduct himself as becomes a true son of obedience, and to draw from his sacrifice the greatest possible profit for his spiritual advancement.

II.—In the cloister we are surrounded by the best of associates, each of them chosen out of thousands and tens of thousands. A religious community is a family, united in Jesus Christ, where all vie with one another in contempt of the world, love for their holy rules, and zeal for the glory of God and the sanctification of their souls. Every day that dawns makes us more clearly realise how good and sweet it is for brothers to dwell together in concord. Never shall we be able to thank the Lord sufficiently for having called us to religion. Never shall we be able to repay our communities for all they have done for us. And yet, even though all our associates were saints, we should expect to find amongst mortal men some vestiges of human weakness. There must be at least diversities of characters and temperaments, varieties of sentiments and wills, a thousand little nothings that shall make us suffer; all the more inasmuch as the habit of being treated with delicate consideration has rendered us keenly sensitive to anything like rudeness.

If, then, it should happen to be our lot to have to suffer something from those around us, we must first of all persuade ourselves that such is the will of God. For He it is, and not chance, Who has brought us together from the

four quarters of the world and united us in this community, under these superiors, so that we may live here as brothers in perpetual contact. Divergencies of tempers, views, tastes, and the countless other individual characteristics can be reduced to harmony only by the power of virtue. Many mutual sacrifices have to be made in the interests of peace. God knows this, and it is precisely on this account that He has brought us all into such close relations one with another. In heaven we shall enjoy perfect repose, the peace resulting from victory. But our time on earth is a time of conflict : of conflict against ourselves to repair our faults, to overcome our defects, and to grow in virtue and merit. The means at our disposal for attaining these ends are manifold. But one of the most efficacious is community life with the sacrifices it imposes.

“ Because you have not sufficiently brought home to yourself this great principle,” wrote De Caussade to one of his penitents, “ you have never been able to submit, as you should, to certain conditions and occurrences, nor consequently to remain firmly and tranquilly united to the will of God. The demon has tempted, disquieted, agitated you with a thousand illusions and false reasonings in this respect. Try, therefore, I entreat you, for the sake of your salvation and your peace of mind, to return from your spiritual wanderings. Thereby you will put an end to all your vexations and all the revolts of your heart.” <sup>31</sup>

No, the sufferings inseparable from family and community life, the opposition of humours and characters, are not so much an impediment to our spiritual progress as a providential and very precious means. It is in our want of faith, humility, and mortification we should seek the source of our distemper ; the difficulties we encounter from others only serve to expose it to view. As the evil comes from within us, it is there the remedy should be applied. And here is the reason why God wills these

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<sup>31</sup> *Abandon*, I, vi, *lettre*, 6.

oppositions of temperament, these trials so crucifying to self-love, so constantly renewed.

What excellent penance for the sins of the past! "Charity covereth a multitude of sins" (I *Peter* iv, 8), and God will treat us as we shall have treated our brothers. Therefore, let us forgive and we shall be forgiven. Let us forget the wrongs we have suffered from our brothers, and God will gladly forget the wrongs He has suffered from us. Let us support our neighbour, let us be patient with him, show him mercy and kindness; and the Lord, ever faithful to His promise, will deal in the same manner with us. It costs something to suffer without respite. But what confidence it gives us, what consolation, to be able to assure ourselves that at this price we have obtained the right to count upon God's mercy! The practice of such charity is a magnificent means of sanctification. Without it we should lack many virtues. If we would acquire mutual forbearance, patience, and self-denial, is it not necessary that there shall be people to oppose us, to oppose us in season and out of season, and mercilessly, so to speak? We should imagine we knew ourselves, and all the time entertain the most fantastic illusions, if this person or that in a moment of temper did not frankly tell us the truth about ourselves. How many humiliations are required to produce humility! Should we be able to choose the most suitable humiliations for ourselves—those we have need of, not those we like? And should we have the strength to submit to them with perseverance, as a sick man submits to a rigorous *régime*? Instead of complaining, let us bless God Who has had the wisdom and the goodness to place at our side such or such a religious; for that neighbour is necessary to us. A holy foundress once said to her spiritual daughters: "Each of you has her own disposition, temper, imperfections, eccentricities. If we had in the community no difficult characters, we should be obliged to purchase some in order that they might help us to heaven."<sup>32</sup> God has provided us with

<sup>32</sup> *Vie de la Bse. M.-Mad. de Postel*, c. xxxvii.

such necessities free of cost; and it is for us to make the most of this means of mortification.

Besides, these contradictions, constantly renewed, “ will provide us each day with repeated opportunities for the practice of the rarest and most solid virtues: charity, patience, gentleness, humility of heart, kindness, mortification of the temper, etc. And these little daily virtues, faithfully practised, will yield us a rich harvest of graces and merits for eternity. It is thus, better than by any other means, we can obtain a great gift of interior prayer, peace of heart, recollection, the continual sense of God’s presence, and His pure and perfect love. This cross alone, if patiently borne, will bring us an infinity of graces. It will serve more effectually than other crosses, heavier in appearance, to detach us completely from ourselves in order to unite us perfectly to God.” <sup>33</sup> So speaks De Caussade. And he adds:

“ Far from pitying you, I can only congratulate you on having found at last an occasion for the practice of true charity. The antipathy you feel for the person with whom you are continually associated, the opposition between your ideas and temperaments, the pain he causes you by his manners and language are so many infallible guarantees that the charity you will exercise in his regard shall be purely supernatural without the least alloy of human sentiment. You will be working in a rich gold-mine with every opportunity of amassing an immense fortune. Therefore, thank the good God; and in order not to lose any of the precious advantages of your position, follow exactly the rules I am now going to prescribe:

“ I.—Endure patiently the involuntary feelings of resentment excited in your heart by the conduct of this person, just as you would endure an attack of fever or headache. For, in truth, your antipathy is a kind of fever, with its shiverings and paroxysms. Oh, how crucifying it is! How humbling and painful! And for that very reason, how meritorious and sanctifying!

<sup>33</sup> *Abandon*, I, v, *let.*, 5.



" II.—Never speak as, perhaps, others do about this person, but always say something to his advantage. For he must have some good qualities. And which of us is altogether free from defect? Where shall you find perfection in this world? Perhaps, without your will and knowledge, you are actually causing him more pain than God, through his means, is inflicting upon you? The Lord frequently makes use of one diamond to polish another, according to Fénelon.

" III.—Whenever you commit any fault, repair it at once by gently humbling yourself without any voluntary bitterness against either this person or yourself, without anxiety, ill-humour, or disquietude. Our faults, thus repaired, become profitable and advantageous. By means of these daily miseries and faults, God never ceases to lower our pride and keep us in true humility of heart.

" IV.—Finally, be careful not to entangle yourself in any business except in so far as duty may require. And your duty discharged, do not let it further preoccupy your mind: think no more of it, save before God. Let us abandon everything to Providence. The one thing essential is that we should belong entirely to God and so attain to salvation." <sup>34</sup>

In bearing trials of this kind, St. Jane de Chantal is a perfect model. Left a widow at the age of twenty-eight, she received a command from her father-in-law to come, with her four children, and dwell with him. She realised at once the bitterness of the chalice she would have to drink, for she knew the old baron's character, the disorders of his house, and the still greater disorders of his conduct. This gloomy old man, to whose will everyone was obliged to yield, had fallen under the influence of a female servant who ruled his château as a mistress, squandered his means, and excited the discontent of the household. During more than seven years, the Saint was treated like a stranger who is admitted, indeed, to the domestic hearth, but never consulted about anything, or

<sup>34</sup> *Abandon*, I, v, *let.*, 4.

allowed the right to make any suggestions. She lived, so to speak, under the rod of an impudent servant, who was anything but sparing of insults. She had to endure the humiliation of seeing this servant's children put on a level with and even preferred to her own. Hot anger took possession of her, her aristocratic blood rebelled, especially at the beginning. But she suppressed these uprisings of nature, and received every insult with a meek heart and a gracious countenance. She carried her heroism so far as to look after the hireling's children as if they were her own, and to render them with her own hands the humblest of services. And what was the secret of this victory over self? Charity! Exclusively occupied with her great design: the conversion of her father-in-law and the unworthy servant: she determined to conquer both of them by the power of meekness. There was no labour or sacrifice she would not willingly undertake in the hope of leading them back to God. She never missed an opportunity of rendering them service. No violence, no outrage could diminish her respect for them or tire her patience. "To this exalted motive, which sustained her in her heroic life for seven years, she united another which gave her no less support. By nature she was somewhat haughty. From her father she had inherited a proud and imperious disposition, which she was resolved to suppress at any cost. In her present position she saw a golden opportunity of becoming humble by means of humiliations. She succeeded wonderfully. In this severe school God made her acquire, better than she could have done in the most rigorous of noviciates, that rare humility and perfect obedience which later, under the guidance of St. Francis de Sales, became the means of so much good." <sup>35</sup> God grant that we also may correspond to such graces with the same spirit of faith and with equal generosity!

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<sup>35</sup> Bougaud, *Hist. de Ste. Ch.*, cc. iv et v.

## CHAPTER IV

### ON ABANDONMENT IN THE NATURAL GOODS OF THE BODY AND THE MIND

#### ARTICLE I.—HEALTH AND SICKNESS

**W**E can make a good use of health and sickness or we can abuse both.

Health is its own recommendation. There is no need to prove that it promotes prayer, pious reading, continual intercourse with God; that it facilitates labour, both manual and intellectual; that it enables us to discharge our daily duties with less difficulty. It is, therefore, a precious gift from God, but one we never appreciate so highly as when we have lost it. Whilst it remains to us, we do not, alas! always remember to thank God for it. A precious gift, even though it increases, perhaps, the difficulty of subjecting the flesh to the spirit, of keeping ourselves from undue absorption in the interests of the present life, and of living exclusively for an eternity which does not appear imminent.

“Sickness no less than health is a gift of God. He sends it to us in order to try our virtue or to correct our faults; to manifest to us our weakness or to disabuse us of an exaggerated esteem of ourselves; to detach us from the love of earthly objects and sensual pleasures; to mortify our impetuous ardour, and to weaken the power of the flesh, our greatest enemy; to remind us that we are here below in a land of exile and that heaven is our true home; to secure to us, in short, all the advantages which can be derived from this trial, if accepted with gratitude and as a special favour.”<sup>1</sup> When sanctified as it should be, the time of sickness is “one of the most precious

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<sup>1</sup> Rodriguez, *Perf. Chrét.*, 8<sup>e</sup> tr., c. xvi.

periods of our lives. In one day of sickness, patiently endured, we shall make more progress in virtue, pay off more of our debt to the divine justice for past sins, amass greater treasures of merit, render ourselves more pleasing to God and give Him greater glory, than we could do in a week or a month of health. But if the time of sickness is a precious time, a time of salvation, there are very few who employ it profitably, who strive to make the most of their infirmities.”<sup>2</sup> “I call the time of sickness the touchstone of virtue,” writes St. Alphonsus. “For it is then we discover the real value of the virtues possessed by a soul. If she supports this trial without disquietude, without complaint, without excessive desires of health, in perfect obedience to the physicians and superiors; if she remains tranquil, entirely resigned to the will of God: that is an indication that she is solidly grounded in virtue. But what are we to think of a patient who complains of the lack of attention he receives from those charged with caring him, of the sufferings he finds unendurable, of the inefficaciousness of his medicines, of the ignorance of his doctor, and who sometimes goes so far as to murmur against God Himself, as if treated by Him with excessive severity?”<sup>3</sup>

Should we belong to the number of the wise who abuse neither health nor sickness, but know how to employ both to best advantage? Or should we rather find a stumbling-block in health and an occasion of ruin in sickness? We cannot tell: it is exclusively God’s secret. Therefore, we can do nothing better than to establish ourselves in a holy indifference, and to resign ourselves to the divine good-pleasure whatsoever it may be. That is the necessary condition for being always ready to receive with love and confidence all that Providence may think proper to send us: vigorous health, weakness, sickness, or bodily or mental infirmities.

However, abandonment forbids only undue pre-

<sup>2</sup> Saint-Jure, *Conn. et am. de N.-S. J.-C.*, I, iii, c. xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> *Conf.*, 5, 3, et *Ver. ép.*, c. xiii.

occupation. It dispenses nobody from observing the laws of prudence. Even moderate desires it does not exclude. Our health may be more or less necessary to our community. We need it ourselves for the discharge of our duties. "Consequently," says St. Alphonsus, "to take reasonable care of it with a view to the service of God is rather virtue than sin." There are two dangers to be guarded against here: too much or too little precaution. We have not the right to injure our health by excess or by culpable imprudence. But, on the other hand, as St. Alphonsus again notes, "it would be sinful to be over-careful of our health, particularly because, under the inspiration of self-love, we then easily pass beyond what is necessary to what is superfluous."<sup>4</sup> This second danger is much more to be feared than the first. Hence it is that St. Bernard denounces so strongly the too-zealous disciples of Epicurus and Hippocrates. "Epicurus has no thought but for pleasure, Hippocrates thinks of nothing but health. My Master, on the contrary, preaches contempt for both one and the other. He bids me renounce, if necessary, the life of the body in order to save the life of the soul, and in this He condemns the prudence of the flesh which either occupies itself in the pursuit of pleasure or in the extravagant attention to health."<sup>5</sup>

St. Teresa humorously complains of those religious who are excessively preoccupied with their health. When they are really strong enough to attend choir without any danger, "they absent themselves one day because they have a headache, another day because they had a headache, and two or three more days because they fear they will have a headache."<sup>6</sup> The Saint herself did not always avoid this danger, as she admits in her *Life*: "What does the body aim at by demanding so much attention if it be not the ruin of the soul? The demon, on his side, observes some fear in us. That suggests his line of action; and at once he begins to persuade us that we are

<sup>4</sup> *Vér. ép. de J.-C.*, c. vii.

<sup>5</sup> *In Cant.*, xxx.

<sup>6</sup> *Chemin*, c. x.

killing ourselves, or at least injuring our health. I know his method, because I have myself experienced this temptation. But I ask him : What better use can we make of good health than to lose it in the service of God ? Ill as I was, I saw myself always tied down, incapable of performing the least good action, until I took the resolution to pay no further attention to body or health. God enlightened me with regard to the demon's artifice. When he warned me of the risk I ran of losing my health, I answered that it mattered little whether I lived or died. When he pointed out that I should certainly lose my repose, I replied that I no longer needed repose, that the cross was sufficient for me : and so on. I see clearly now that although my infirmities were real enough, I yielded often to this temptation of the spirit of darkness, or to my own cowardice. And, as a matter of fact, my health has been much improved since I began to treat my body with less indulgence and delicacy." 7

Thoroughly persuaded that sanctity is our end, and bodily health but a secondary means, let us meet all the demon's suggestions with the noble words of Gemma Galgani : " The soul must come first, then the body." 8 And let us meditate often on the grave admonition of St. Alphonsus : " It is to be feared that, in taking the health of the body too much to heart, you put your souls in danger, or at the very least imperil the work of your sanctification. Consider that, if the saints showed as much solicitude about their health as you do, they would never have been sanctified." 9

When sickness, weakness, or any infirmity befalls us, are we permitted to complain with resignation, to entertain moderate desires, and to make submissive supplications ? Most certainly.

St. Francis de Sales allows his dear Theotime to recite all the lamentations of Job and Jeremias, on condition that in the highest point of his soul he conforms himself to the good-pleasure of God. But he gently rallies those who

7 *Vie*, c. xiii.

8 *Gem. Gal.*, c. v.

9 *Vér. ép.*, c. vii.

are never done complaining, who cannot find enough people to listen to their detailed accounts of their sufferings, whose afflictions are always most terrible whilst those of their neighbours are quite insignificant. As for the Saint himself, he was never heard to complain. He would very simply explain his trouble, without exaggerating or minimising anything : for he detested both cowardice and duplicity.<sup>10</sup>

“ I do not forbid you,” says St. Alphonsus, “ to make known your sufferings when they are serious. But to give yourselves up to moaning and groaning for every trifle, and to desire to see everybody making lamentation about you : this I condemn as a weakness. . . . When heavy afflictions befall us, it is not sinful to ask Our Lord to deliver us from them. But it would be more perfect not to complain of the anguish we feel. We should be doing the most perfect thing of all if we asked for neither health nor sickness, but abandoned ourselves to the will of God, so that He might dispose of us according to His pleasure. However, if we desire to solicit our cure, let us do so at least with resignation, and under the condition that bodily health will conduce to the salvation of our souls. Otherwise our prayer will be defective and consequently without result : for Our Lord will only hearken to prayers for what is good, offered with resignation to His will.”<sup>11</sup>

“ It seems to me,” writes St. Teresa, “ a very serious imperfection to fall into ceaseless lamentations over every little ailment. I am not now speaking of grievous trials, such as would be a violent fever, although I would like to see these supported always with patience and resignation ; I am speaking of those slight indispositions which one can bear without troubling the whole community. As for grave illnesses, they will attract attention enough of themselves, and cannot long remain concealed. Nevertheless, when we are really sick we should make our condition known and accept all the assistance that may be necessary.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. iii; *Entret.* xxi.

<sup>11</sup> *Vér. ép.*, c. xiii.

<sup>12</sup> *Chemin*, c. xi.

Thus, the Saints and Doctors of the Church permit us to complain with due moderation and to offer submissive petitions to God : they condemn only insubordination and excess. Still, they always prefer that which is most in accord with the divine good-pleasure, as St. Francis de Sales remarks ; and they say with St. Alphonsus : “ Lord, I desire neither to get well nor to remain ill ; I desire only what Thou willest.” <sup>13</sup> St. Francis de Sales permits his spiritual daughters to ask their cure of Our Lord, Who alone can give it, yet with the proviso that such be His holy will. He himself, however, would never pray to be delivered from his ailments. He was only too happy, he said, to be made suffer in his body, because, not having done sufficient voluntary penance, a little necessary penance might serve to make good the deficit. We read in the Office of St. Camillus de Lellis that, when suffering from five tedious and painful maladies, he used to call them the mercies of the Lord, and was careful never to ask for their cure.

Far from us be the thought of censuring those who pray for the cure or the lightening of their afflictions, provided that they do so with submission. Our Lord praised the sick who pressed about Him ; and He often rewards with miracles those who throng to Lourdes. Assuredly, in such pious pilgrimages we have a magnificent demonstration of faith and confidence, glorious for God and impressive for the Christian people. But here is a sick person, so detached from himself, so conformed to the divine will, so ready in advance for all that God may ordain, that he is content with testifying his loving confidence in his heavenly Father, forms no desire of his own in matters of which God reserves the decision to Himself, embraces with a good heart that decision, whatsoever it may be, and is satisfied to discharge his duty in the holiest manner possible. Does not this generous patient manifest, at the very least, as much faith, confidence, love, devotion and self-denial as those others who pray for their cure?

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<sup>13</sup> *Conform.*, 5, 3.



Everyone is free, of course, to have his preference and to follow his special attraction. For ourselves, the opinion supported by the authority and practice of Sts. Francis de Sales and Alphonsus pleases us best.

“Whenever you happen to fall into any sickness,” says the pious Bishop of Geneva, “fight against it with such remedies as are possible to you and according to God : religious, being subject to a superior, should accept with simplicity and submission the remedies offered them. To act otherwise would be tempting God. But having thus done your duty in this respect, await with entire resignation the issue which Providence shall determine. Should it please the Divine Majesty that the illness yield to the remedies, render Him humble thanks. But if He prefers that the malady should prevail over the remedies, bless His name with patience. We must submit not alone to be sick, but to be sick of the malady which God wills for us, in the place where He wills, amongst the persons He wills, with the particular discomforts He wills, making no choice and refusing no ailment or affliction, no matter what it may be, no matter how undignified and degrading it may seem to us : for illness or affliction unaccompanied with degradation often results in inflating the heart instead of humbling it. But when one suffers from what is regarded as a disgraceful malady, or when disgrace itself, dishonour, and contempt are the cause of our suffering, what an opportunity we have for practising patience, humility, modesty, and meekness of spirit and heart !”<sup>14</sup>

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus “adopted as a principle that one should never complain until one has reached the end of one’s resources. How often she came to choir for the Office of Matins, whilst suffering from vertigo or violent headaches ! ‘I can walk,’ she would say to herself, ‘then I ought to be doing my duty.’ And thanks to this energy of will, she performed actions that were really

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<sup>14</sup> *Vie dev.*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. iii.

heroic.”<sup>15</sup> Our regulations require us to make known our infirmities to our superiors, and we are bound to avoid indiscretion. But inspired by such a beautiful example of generosity, let us continue to discharge faithfully, even in sickness, those duties that demand nothing but good will, and, so far as it may be possible to us, those also which require bodily fitness. In order to sanctify our ailments we should follow the prudent counsel of St. Francis de Sales: “Practise obedience. Accept whatever is offered to you: the medicines, the special diet, and the other remedies, for the love of God, remembering the gall which He accepted for love of us. Desire to be cured only in order to render Him service, resign yourself to continue in illness from obedience to Him, and be ready to die if such be His will, unto His praise and glory. Often with the interior eyes of your soul contemplate Jesus crucified, naked, blasphemed, calumniated, abandoned, and overwhelmed with all kinds of disgust, sadness, and labour. Then consider all your own afflictions, which neither in number nor intensity can be compared with His, and reflect that never shall you be asked to suffer for Him so much as He has suffered for you.”<sup>16</sup>

It was thus the Blessed Marie-Madeleine Postel acted. She suffered from a violent asthma, which, like a faithful companion, never left her for at least thirty years. She regarded it as a friend and benefactor. Sometimes she looked so pale and breathed with such difficulty that she seemed about to expire. “Thanks, my God!” she would exclaim. “Thanks, my God! May Thy holy will be done! Yet more, Lord, yet more!” Once when somebody expressed sympathy for her in her sufferings she replied: “Why, it is nothing. The Saviour endured much more than this for us.” And then as gaily as a young girl she began to sing: “*Quand te verrai-je, O belle Patrie.*”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Histoire*, c. xii.

<sup>16</sup> *Vie dévote*, 3<sup>re</sup> P., c. iii.

<sup>17</sup> *La Bse. M.-Mad. de Postel*, cc. xxxi-ii.

## ARTICLE II.—THE CONSEQUENCES OF ILLNESS

The prolonged duration of a malady, and the languor that accompanies and follows it, contribute very much to its unpleasantness. And all this should be made the object of filial and trustful abandonment.

Since it is the Most High "Who has created physicians and medicines" (*Eccli.* xxxviii, 1-4), it is in the order of Divine Providence that we should have recourse to them at need, seculars with prudent moderation, religious according to obedience. But God holds in His sovereign hand the malady and the remedy and the physician. "It was neither herb nor mollifying plaster that healed them, but Thy word, O Lord, which healeth all things" (*Wis.* xvi, 12). God cured in bygone times, and He still cures at His pleasure, without employing any human means, as when Our Lord with a word restored health to the sick. He cured in bygone times, and still cures at His pleasure, by the use of means that are harmless but without curative properties; for example, when through Eliseus He sent Naaman to bathe seven times in the Jordan, or when Jesus laid His hands on the sick or applied saliva. He cured in bygone times, and still cures at His pleasure, by the use of means which seem noxious, as when Jesus put mud on the eyes of the man born blind. And in spite of the science of the doctors, in spite of the devotion of the nurses, in spite of the efficaciousness of the remedies, He causes whom He wills to languish in sickness, and we all end by dying, the most illustrious physician just as the least of his patients. God is, therefore, the absolute Master of health and of sickness. It is in Him we must put our trust; nor must we rely, as did Asa (*II Par.* xvi, 12), with exaggerated confidence on human means; for He gives or denies them success as it pleases Him. If then, notwithstanding the medicines and other remedies, our illness is prolonged and our infirmities persist, we must adore the holy will of God with humble and childlike submission. The Lord has not allowed the

physician to understand the case fully, or the remedy to have its effect. Perhaps He has willed that these should aggravate instead of curing our ailment. However it may be, we know that His action has been inspired by paternal love and directed to the good of our souls. And it is for us to profit by it.

One of our principal trials, therefore, is the prolongation of illness. We should be particularly on our guard against discontent, discouragement, murmuring, and the temptation to find fault with those who are charged with the care of us. No doubt, these fulfil their duties with great devotedness, and deserve all our gratitude. If they have been in any way negligent, God will hold them to account for it. But meantime He has been pleased to avail Himself of their services in order to keep us on the cross, and we must see even in this a loving design of Providence. The error or the skill, the negligence or the attentiveness : everything has been clearly foreseen ; there is nothing that has not been deliberately chosen, nothing that God cannot utilise as a means to conduct us to our end. And therefore let us attend only to God in our tribulation, let us believe in His love for us, and let us gladly welcome the trial as a gift from His hands. St. Alphonsus, in the following words, rebukes those invalids who are too prone to complain of want of attention : “ I also have a complaint to make, and it is of you I complain ; not on account of your sufferings, but for your want of patience. In truth, you are doubly ill, ill in body and ill in soul. You complain of being forgotten, but you on your side forget Jesus Christ dying on the cross and abandoned by all for love of you. What is the good of complaining of this person or that, when you should rather be complaining of yourselves for having so little love for Jesus Christ, and, consequently, for manifesting so little patience. St. Joseph de Calasanza used to say : ‘ If men would only practise patience in sickness, complaints would disappear from the earth.’ According to Salvien : ‘ Many holy persons would never

have attained to sanctity if they had enjoyed good health.' And as a matter of fact, to speak only of women who have sanctified themselves, read their lives and you will see that all of them or nearly all were subject to infirmities. St. Teresa during forty years never passed a single day without suffering. Therefore Salvien says further: 'As a rule, persons consecrated to the love of Jesus Christ are and desire to be weak in health.' " 18

The manifold languors resulting from sickness are another very painful trial. To a greater or lesser extent, we can no longer, as in times of health, observe the whole rule, attend choir, communicate, pray, practise penance, be assiduous at manual labour, at study, and at all the duties of our office; and when the malady is an obstinate one, this incapacity may be of long duration. "Tell me, faithful soul," says St. Alphonsus, "why are you so anxious to discharge these duties? Is it not to please God? Very well! Then what are you troubled about, since you know with certainty that it is God's good-pleasure that you should no longer, as heretofore, glorify Him with these prayers, these Communions, these penances, these studies, this preaching and other practices, but that you should patiently support this malady and these sufferings which He sends you?" 19 "My friend," wrote the Venerable John d'Avila to a sick priest, "do not consider what you would do if in health, but content yourself with being a good patient for so long as it shall please God. If it is truly His will you are seeking, what matter whether you are ill or well?" It belongs to God to apply us, according to His good-pleasure, to the exercises of health or of sickness. Our part is to attend only to His holy will, to love it and adore it, since it is always the one supreme rule. Let us, therefore, whilst in health, discharge all the duties of the strong, and when ill the duties of invalids as they are determined by our rules. God requires this from us, and nothing else. And what reason

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18 *Vér. ép.*, c. xiii.

19 *Conf.*, 5, 3.

would there be in troubling ourselves once we have given Him all He wants? Disquietude would only prove that either we do not understand our duty, or we have allowed ourselves to be imposed upon by the artifices of the demon.

But, you will object, the continuance of this malady prevents me from discharging the duties of my office, and what is going to happen in the future? That is going to happen which God wills. Has He not the right to dispose of you in this as in all other circumstances? So long as your superiors, fully informed of the matter, judge it well to keep you in your office, just do your best to carry on, and remain in peace. All is well with you so long as you accomplish the will of God. He has a thousand means of supplying for that which is beyond your capacity, if such be His good-pleasure. He chooses His instruments as He thinks proper, and supplies them with means as best pleases Him. He allowed St. Paul to languish two years in a prison cell, exactly at a time when the infant Church seemed to stand in the greatest need of such an Apostle.

At least, someone will say, if I could only pray as I have been accustomed, it would console me in my helpless condition. "But there is no better way of serving God," answers St. Alphonsus, "than by embracing joyously His holy will. It is not so much our labours that glorify the Lord, as our resignation and the conformity of our will to His good-pleasure."<sup>20</sup> Hence St. Francis de Sales assures us that we render more glory to God in one hour of suffering with filial submission than in many of labour with less love. When a sick person once complained to him of his inability to devote himself to mental prayer, which had been his delight and support, the Saint replied: "Don't let that worry you. The endurance of the blows of Providence is as good as meditation. And it is better to be nailed to the cross with the Saviour than merely to contemplate the cross."<sup>21</sup> Besides, a generous soul will

<sup>20</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *Esprit*, xviii, 50.

remain faithful to her usual daily exercises so far as possible. And to accomplish her accustomed task, it will often be sufficient to make a wise distribution of her time, to simplify her prayer, and to adapt it to her present condition. "For the loving soul," says St. Teresa, "the best kind of prayer during illness is to offer her sufferings to God, to keep Him constantly in mind, to conform herself to His holy will, and to perform the thousand little acts of this sort of which she will have the occasion. And she will need no violent effort to enter into this intimate intercourse with her Divine Spouse."<sup>22</sup> To which St. Alphonsus adds: "Let us when in sickness utter simply the ejaculation: Thy will be done. Let us repeat it with all the fervour we can command, a hundred times, a thousand times, incessantly; and thus we shall please God more than by the practice of all possible mortifications and devotions."<sup>23</sup>

Finally, you may object: "My illness and infirmities render me useless. I am a burthen to the community, and, moreover, I scandalise my brethren by not observing the rule in all its prescriptions." Undoubtedly, a good patient will be as self-sacrificing as he can. He will take care not to be the cause of unnecessary expense, or to demand superfluities, or to appear over-exacting and difficult to please. And the attention lavished on him, he will try to repay with gratitude and docility. As it is Our Lord Who is served in his person, he will endeavour to resemble this Divine Model. Desirous of advancing always and of receiving the full benefit from his many crosses, he will keep God and eternity constantly in view. Whatever points of the rule remain within his capacity will be generously observed; what is impossible will be compensated for by self-denial, humility, prayer, and abandonment. Without his suspecting it, such a patient edifies those around him, and is a source of blessing to the whole community. After all, it is not his will

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<sup>22</sup> *Vie*, vii.

<sup>23</sup> *Conf.*, 5, 3.

but the divine good-pleasure that has laid this cross of a passing sickness or a protracted infirmity on their shoulders. He has himself to support the heaviest part of it; still there remains a part to be borne by the infirmarian, the superior, and the community. But has not God the right to make use of us, as of other means, to demand a sacrifice from our brethren and to impose a duty on them? Those who attend us will be able, by the grace of God, to abandon themselves, as we do, to Divine Providence and to fulfil the duties it has marked out for them in our regard. Our duty is to accept with patience the humiliation of feeling ourselves a burden, and also to lighten that burden for our brethren by showing a truly religious spirit. We should also imitate that religieuse who, being unable to hold her classes, considered herself useless, but humbly submitted to the good-pleasure of God, and consoled herself with the thought that she had still three means of well-doing: prayer, example, and the exact observance of her rule. A good patient is only in appearance useless; in reality he can be the cause of the greatest benefits if he so wills. For that which the community has the greatest need of is not strong arms for heavy work or gifted minds for intellectual occupations, but virtuous members, fervent souls ardently desirous of perfection, true contemplatives and true penitents. It depends upon us, with the grace of God, to make ourselves such in illness as in health, although by means somewhat different. Then God will be satisfied, and the community will have no cause to complain. But if, despite our goodwill, one or other individual should judge us with severity, we cannot be accused of giving disedification; we must only submit to the humiliation of being misunderstood until the Lord sees fit to justify our conduct.

Our austere St. Bernard was extremely frail and delicate. But he paid more attention to generosity than to prudence, with the result that, almost at the beginning of his religious life, he became seriously ill and never completely recovered. When he presented himself before the bishop of



Châlons for the abbatial blessing, he was already so emaciated that he seemed almost at the point of death. Out of obedience he put himself under the care of a pompous quack who succeeded in utterly ruining his health by obliging him to take food which a strong man, ravenous with hunger, could scarcely be induced to touch. But the Saint accepted everything with indifference, without murmur or complaint. A constriction of the gullet which allowed him to swallow hardly anything but liquids, a natural weakness of the stomach, and a complete disorganisation of the intestines, were his three life-long infirmities. He had also other afflictions to endure from time to time. Often he would cast up his food just as he had taken it; the little he retained kept him alive only to torture him. Yet in spite of all these sufferings, which reduced him to a skeleton, he further punished his body by severe fasts, extremely prolonged watchings, and the most arduous labour. Regarding himself to the last as a beginner in spirituality, he said he needed all the regularity of the noviciate, all the austerities of the Order, and the most rigorous kind of discipline, to keep him in the path of duty.

He was obliged, nevertheless, to submit to such a *régime* as his stomach could support. But the spirit of sacrifice and poverty suffered nothing thereby. Quite the contrary. With incredible courage, he kept as much as possible with the community in choir, at work, everywhere. If the labour which occupied his brethren was altogether beyond his strength, he worked with a spade in the garden, or cut firewood, and carried the blocks on his shoulder. When even such occupations were too much for him, he would choose for himself the most abject employments in the house, to compensate for fatigue by humility. Never would he absent himself from the community exercises except under pressure of necessity. Such necessity, however, was of frequent occurrence. And the time came when, hardly able to hold himself erect, he was obliged to remain almost continually seated, and

very seldom moved about. He tried to make up for the exercises he missed by devoting himself to prayer, pious reading, study and composition; at the same time he did all he could to help his religious by direction and preaching. But when the Church required his services he forgot his exhausted condition, faced the fatigue of long journeys, executed the most important commissions, preached in season and out of season, and rose superior to every occasion. Then he would return to his monastery more ill than ever, but also more eager for that life of penance and contemplation which he loved so well. Such an existence was little better than a prolonged death-agony. "When people compassionated the Saint, when his brethren implored him to exercise a little caution, he only raised his eyes to the image of the Crucified, all covered with blood and wounds, and, more docile to the promptings of love than to the counsels of prudence, refused to listen to the voice of filial tenderness, and continued to drink from his bitter chalice."<sup>24</sup> Did his maladies prevent him from being a perfect Cistercian, from being more useful than any other to his community and even to the Universal Church?

The Blessed Alice, or Adelaide, a Cistercian nun, had to endure throughout her whole life the cruellest torments and a horrible leprosy. Isolated from the community on account of her terrible disease, she made use of her solitude to unite herself more closely to God by continual prayer. She actually took pleasure in her sad situation for the love of Christ, her Divine Spouse, and in the poor sores which often caused her to experience a joy and a consolation beyond anything this world can impart. Rich in the gifts of heaven, illustrious on account of her miracles, she cured many lepers by the imposition of her hands. She had, therefore, mounted to the heights. Our Lord, however, was pleased to make her mount still higher. But how? By redoubling her afflictions and

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<sup>24</sup> *Seconde Vie par Alain*, cc. x et xiv.

giving her the grace to grow in patience. On the feast of St. Barnabas she seemed to be at death's door. But Our Lord told her she was to be given another year of life, and during all that period would have to suffer the most afflicting ailments for the honour of her Well-Beloved. So she lost her sight, her hands became contracted, and her body covered with ulcers from which issued constantly streams of pus and swarms of worms. These terrible sufferings she endured with invincible patience until, on the return of the feast of St. Barnabas, she breathed forth her pure soul in the embrace of Christ.

St. Gertrude the Great, who, with St. Mechtilde, her novice-mistress and friend, lived at Helfta according to the observance of Citeaux, had very poor health. Sometimes her malady kept her on her couch for long periods together. Frequent attacks of insomnia, combined with her devotion to prayer and her transports, weakened her to the point of exhaustion. Consequently, she was often unable to assist at the Divine Office; often, too, when she did attend she had to remain the whole time seated. Fasting was forbidden her at all times, not excepting the holy season of Lent. She was even obliged to take some nourishment during the night, and during the Office when it happened to be very long. It was a humiliation to see herself reduced to such necessity. She lamented her inability to observe the postures of the choir, and felt tempted to refuse the aliments offered out of meal-time. But Our Lord bade her receive everything as from His own hand, and to derive profit from these indulgences for her spiritual advancement. What particularly grieved her was the trouble she caused her companions: although in truth they served her with the tenderest affection. Did she not amply repay them by her unceasing prayers, her supernatural counsels, and her sisterly admonitions? Happy infirmities, which procured for her, amongst other advantages, the leisure for intimate intercourse with God, without which, perhaps, we should not possess those writings of hers, so full of devotion and unction.

We could cite many other examples, taken from the annals of our Order. They would show that sickness and infirmities, far from being an obstacle barring the way are in truth an efficacious means to sanctity. The good patients walk, run, or fly towards their goal, according to their several dispositions. The bad patients, alas! derive little profit from their sufferings. But for that they must only blame their own want of courage and submission.

Let us conclude this article with the following remarks of Saint-Jure on the subject of convalescence: "This is one of the most dangerous periods of our lives, because we are compelled, in spite of ourselves, to grant some indulgence to nature, to treat it more gently in order to recruit its strength. Now, we are easily led thereby to give ourselves undue liberty and to grow lax. We gratify our appetites and our tastes under the pretext of necessity, our love of ease on the plea of weakness; and we neglect prayer and other practices of piety for fear of fatiguing ourselves. We indulge in useless conversations and puerile amusements as a means of relaxation, as if the care of recovering our health gave us the right to see, hear, and say everything that presents itself. And because our minds are not usefully occupied, they give ready admission to a thousand idle thoughts, which fill them with distractions. This is what we must expect unless we keep a sufficiently close watch over ourselves."<sup>25</sup> But the best maxim to follow, both in sickness and in health, is that of Gemma Galgani: "The soul first, then the body."

#### ARTICLE III.—LIFE OR DEATH

Sooner or later, we must all die. But when? And under what circumstances? On these points we are left in complete ignorance. God, the absolute Master of life and death, has reserved to Himself the knowledge of the

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<sup>25</sup> *Conn et Am.*, I, iii, c. xxiv.

day and the hour. Speaking generally, He shares His secret with no one. Many of the greatest saints did not know the time appointed for their exit, or only learned it towards the end of their lives. Thirty or forty years before his death, St. Alphonsus declared that his last hour was at hand. Blessed ignorance, which obliges us to be always prepared and stimulates without pause our spiritual activity! We should therefore accept this incertitude with submission, even with gratitude. But are we to desire that death should visit us soon, or that it should permit us to remain on earth many years longer?

There are many motives that authorise us to long for a speedy dissolution.

I.—The evils of the present life. Scarcely is a man born when death begins its attacks on him, and he has to engage in a lifelong, truceless war of self-defence. But in spite of nourishment, sleep, and all kinds of remedies, he is ever journeying with rapid strides towards the tomb. His life is, in truth, only a slow and continual death. Labour and fatigue, the inclemency of the seasons, sickness and infirmities, pains of heart and mind, worries and pre-occupations: all conspire to make this earth of ours a veritable valley of tears. To our own personal troubles are added those of our dear ones. And as if so many miseries did not suffice, human malice tries its best to multiply them beyond measure. Individuals rise up against individuals, families against families, nations against nations. People only think of devising new plagues to cause suffering, new engines of war to spread ruin. We must, however, be willing to endure this trial for as long as God ordains. Yet is it not very natural to long for death, whose friendly hand shall wipe away all our tears and introduce us into that blessed abode where we shall encounter no more enemies, no more hatred, no more sorrow, no more suffering of any sort, but everlasting tranquillity, peace and repose without end?

II.—The dangers and the faults of the present life. This earth is a battle-field where we have to struggle day and

night against an invisible enemy, who never sleeps, who knows neither pity nor fatigue. Trained by an experience of sixty centuries, he knows our weak side only too well, and he finds the most dangerous and treacherous accomplices in the very stronghold he is attacking. We are weakness and inconstancy personified. And despite the powerful support offered us by God, failure on our part is a thing always to be feared. Are we actually at this moment in the friendship of God? Shall we be so later on? For final perseverance is a gift, and he who to-day walks the ways of sanctity will, perhaps, to-morrow take the road of relaxation and slip on the incline which slopes to the abyss. Even supposing we escape this supreme misfortune, it is certain that we shall at least fall short of our desires, that we shall commit a multitude of light faults, and that we shall feel rising up in the bottom of our hearts a whole world of passions and inclinations which will give us cause for fear. Now, when we believe ourselves ready, is it not natural to desire the advent of death, so that it may put a speedy end to our incessant sins and continual alarms by confirming us in grace?

Besides, we have to live here below in the midst of a perverse generation in which sins and crimes are multiplied, in which vice triumphs, in which virtue is persecuted, the Church treated as the enemy of mankind, and the Creator an outcast everywhere. How, indeed, can we help sighing for the assembly of the saints, where reigns the God of peace, and where everything shall gladden our eyes and our hearts?

III.—The desire of heaven and the love of God. It is long since we came to realise the emptiness, the powerlessness, the nothingness of this life with its false goods, and, forsaking the world, entered the cloister to seek the Sovereign Good alone. In the measure in which our souls have detached and purified themselves, the desire of heaven has become stronger, and the ardour of our love of God increased almost to impatience. All we want is God, God seen, loved, possessed without delay. True, the God of

our hearts is here, quite close to us, in the Blessed Sacrament. But we want Him without any concealing veil. Sometimes He permits us to find Him in prayer. But we are not satisfied with such a transient and incomplete union. We would hold Him in perfect and everlasting possession. Our bodies stand like the walls of a prison between our souls and our Well-Beloved. Down with them, therefore; let them cease to hide from us the Sole Object of all our affections!

“When, O Lord, shall I see the end of my banishment? When wilt Thou call me to Thyself? When shall I appear before the face of my God? Alas! how slow in coming is the happy hour of my deliverance! But how great shall be my joy when I shall hear it is at hand! What gladness shall be mine when it shall at last be said to me: ‘We shall go into the house of the Lord; our feet shall stand in the courts of Jerusalem’ (*Ps. cxxi, 1-2*).”

Like the Spouse in the Canticle, the great Apostle languished with love, and sighed for the dissolution of his body in order to be with Christ. He was love-sick, and in his impatient desire to rejoice in the presence of his Well-Beloved, the least delay seemed to him as long as an eternity, and filled his soul with sadness. Such also were the sentiments of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus on her death-bed. “Are you resigned to die?” asked her confessor. “Ah! father,” she replied, “I find it is only to live that one has need of resignation. Death will be a joy to me.”<sup>26</sup>

We have, therefore, good reason to desire the speedy advent of death. But there are also reasons, and no less good, for desiring the prolongation of our sojourn on earth. In fact, they are almost identical with those advanced in justification of the opposite desire.

I.—The evils of the present life. By means of patience and the spirit of faith, these can become the occasion of the greatest good. They detach us from the earth and

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<sup>26</sup> *Histoire, c. xii.*

cause us to aspire after a better world. They constitute an excellent purgatory and an inexhaustible mine of virtues and merits. The more they abound, the more abundant, too, shall be our harvest for heaven. If human malice is mingled with them, what matter to us? We wish to see, behind the visible agents, only Divine Providence and, as the result of all our trials, our own spiritual advancement, God glorified, many souls saved, purgatory bedewed with the Blood of the Savior. In heaven we shall have nothing more to suffer, true; but neither shall we there have the power to render our good Master the magnificent homage of trials lovingly endured for His honour.

II.—The dangers and sins of the present life. We readily admit that the thought of the risk to our souls, inseparable from this life, makes one ardently long for heaven. Still, the combat is not without its attractions for a valiant warrior, desirous of winning eternal glory and demonstrating his love and devotion for his dear Sovereign. It is He Who calls us to arms, and shall we not have Him with us in the fight? The cloister is the most secure of entrenchments; and with the help of prayer and vigilance we may hope to acquit ourselves worthily and to escape very serious wounds. So far our victory has been far from complete. Without sufficient time, how shall we repair our defeats, expiate our faults, compensate for our worthlessness, conquer a rich booty? And now particularly, when God finds Himself attacked from all quarters, the duty of His children, of His best-beloved servants, is surely to combat at His side and to suffer for His cause. Such was the conviction of that holy soul who said: "I have, as you know, an ardent desire to be with God. But in this time of persecution, I have a still more ardent desire to suffer for Him. Death has not the same attraction for me when the spouses of Jesus Christ are summoned to Calvary."

III.—The desire of heaven and the love of God. Perhaps it would be safest to die soon; and we should



have the joyful hope of being shortly with our Best-Beloved. However, if God prolongs our lives, provided He will at last bring us safely into port, we shall bless Him for it everlastingly. For here, every instant, we can grow in grace, and consequently acquire a new degree of eternal glory. In the course of a few years we can therefore accumulate hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of degrees. That is to say, it is in our power to enlarge a thousand-fold, a million-fold, our capacity for seeing, loving, and possessing God. What a magnificent increase of glory for Him, of happiness for us, and throughout all eternity! Is our present fortune sufficient? Is it not desirable to add something more to it? And if we have to wait a little longer for our heaven, we can meanwhile be always beautifying it more and more without limit. Hence it would be perhaps very prejudicial to our best interests if God granted our desire for an early death.

IV.—Should a particular individual appear very necessary to the community, that would be a certain indication of the divine will, and consequently a motive for moderating the desire of death. St. Martin of Tours, when dying, found himself in this position. He neither feared to die nor refused to live, but simply abandoned himself to Providence. The great Apostle was faced with the same dilemma. "To die is gain," he wrote to the Philippians, "and if to live in the flesh, this is to me the fruit of labour. But I am straitened between two, having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, a thing by far the better. But to abide still in the flesh is needful for you. And what I shall choose I know not" (*Phil. i, 21-24*).

St. Alphonsus certainly preached perfect conformity to the divine will. Nevertheless he presents his arguments in a way that disposes one to wish for death rather than for life. Rodriguez shows the same leaning. According to St. Teresa the Elder, suffering is the only thing that renders earthly existence tolerable. "Lord, either let me suffer or let me die," she prayed. She could not endure

to be long deprived of the vision of God, yet she would be willing to bear with a good heart all the miseries and pains of this life until the end of the world to obtain one additional degree of heavenly glory.<sup>27</sup> Her friend, Marie Diaz, in her eightieth year, prayed the Lord to prolong her life. When the Saint once told her how ardently she longed for heaven, "My desire," answered Marie, "is, on the contrary, to enter heaven as late as possible. For in this land of exile I can give something to God by labouring and suffering for His glory, whereas in heaven I shall have nothing to offer Him." In the judgment of the Venerable Dupont, "these two desires, diametrically opposed as they are, rest on solid foundations, but that of Marie is to be preferred as giving more to grace which alone can inspire the love of the cross."<sup>28</sup> St. Francis de Sales in his last illness remained faithful to his maxim: desire nothing, ask nothing, refuse nothing. When urged to repeat to God the prayer of the dying St. Martin: "Lord, if I am still necessary to Thy people, I refuse not to labour," he replied with profound humility: "I will do nothing of the kind. I am neither necessary nor useful, but an utterly unprofitable servant."<sup>29</sup> St. Philip Neri expressed himself similarly in the same circumstances. Finally, let us quote these beautiful words of the pious Bishop of Geneva: "I charge myself with the care of leading a good life, but the care of my death I abandon to God."<sup>30</sup> In short, all the saints have practised holy abandonment; but whereas some of them have longed for life or death, others have preferred to be without any desire.

Therefore, whether we weigh the motives or consider the models, like the great Apostle we, too, must remain in suspense. Happily, we are under no obligation to make a choice, and consequently need make no petitions, since there is question of something as to which God reserves

<sup>27</sup> *Vie*, xvi, xxxvii, xl.

<sup>28</sup> *Vie du Bal. Alv.*, x.

<sup>29</sup> *Vie*, par Dom Jean de St. Fr., i, v.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* et *Lettre*, 412.

the decision to Himself. Similarly with regard to the particular time, place, and other circumstances of our death, we have the right to express to God our wishes with filial resignation, or we may leave it to Him to order everything agreeably to His good-pleasure, for the better furtherance of His interests, which in truth are identical with our own.

But we should pray insistently for the grace to receive the Last Sacraments with full consciousness, and to have the help of the prayers of the community when death is at hand; because we shall then have important duties to fulfil and precious succours to avail of. Nevertheless, provided we are really prepared, this petition, however reasonable it may seem, must be subordinated to the good-pleasure of God. Our holy father, St. Bernard, whilst absent from his monastery in the service of the Church, wrote thus to his religious. "Is it necessary, then, sweet Jesus, that my whole life should be passed in sorrow and all my years in mourning? Surely it were better to die at once, but to die in the midst of my brethren, my dearly beloved children. So to die would be very sweet and very secure. It even concerns Thy goodness, O Lord, to grant me this consolation before I leave the earth for ever. I am not worthy to bear the name of father. But deign to permit the children to close the eyes of him to whom they give that title, to see his end, to console him in his last journey, to accompany his soul with their prayers to the mansions of the blessed—that is, if Thou judgest him deserving of such happiness—and to bury his bones amongst Thy servants whose poverty at least he has shared. This boon, O Lord, if I have found favour in Thine eyes, I most ardently desire to obtain through the prayers and merits of my brethren. Nevertheless, not my will by Thine be done. For it is not for myself, but for Thee, that I wish either to live or to die." <sup>31</sup>

One day St. Gertrude, when walking up a steep incline, slipped and rolled down into the valley. Her companions

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<sup>31</sup> *Epist.*, 144.

asked her if she then had any fear of dying without the Sacraments. She replied: "It is my cherished hope not to be deprived of the succours of religion when my last hour has come. But whatever God wills in the matter, that I will, too, because I am convinced that the very best disposition one can have at the hour of death is to be perfectly submissive to the holy will of God."<sup>32</sup>

In fine, the all-important thing for us is to prepare for a holy death by a holy life, since upon that our eternity depends. And that is the grace we should desire above all, and we should ask it constantly and without any condition. Whilst awaiting the moment appointed by Providence, let it be our exclusive concern at every instant to make the time that is left to us as fruitful as possible for eternity. And when our end appears imminent, let it be our sole preoccupation to unite, or rather identify, our wills with the will of God for what regards our death and all its circumstances, even the most humiliating. This is the best way to render our death holy and peaceful.

#### ARTICLE IV.—THE UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF NATURAL GIFTS

We should all be content with the gifts and talents wherewith Providence has endowed us, and no one should ever permit himself to complain of the fact that he has not received as much intelligence or skill as another, or that his strength has been impaired by over-work, years, or illness. This admonition is of general application, because even the most gifted have always some defects which oblige them to practise resignation and humility. It would be all the more dangerous to remain defenceless on this side, since it is just here the demon attacks a great number of souls. He leads them to compare themselves with what they were previously or with what others are, in order to excite in them all kinds of evil sentiments, as proud contempt for their neighbours, extravagant self-

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<sup>32</sup> St. Lig., *Conf.*, 5, 6.

esteem, jealousy attended with malice, spite, and possibly discouragement.

In this matter, just as in everything else, we are bound to conform ourselves to the will of God, to be satisfied with the talents which He has given us, and with the conditions in which He has placed us. Therefore we should not wish to be wiser, more skilful, or held in higher esteem than is in accordance with His good-pleasure. If we are not so liberally endowed as some others, if we have some natural defect of body or mind, an unprepossessing exterior, a disabled limb, poor health, a treacherous memory, a slow intelligence, a weak judgment, little aptitude for this or that employment : we must not complain or murmur because we are so afflicted, nor must we envy those endowed with the qualities which we lack. A person would show very bad taste by taking offence because the present given him as a pure favour was not as rich or as beautiful as he would have liked. Was God obliged to give us a more brilliant mind or a better body? Could He not have created us in a condition less favourable still, or even have left us in our native nothingness? Have we merited as much as He has bestowed on us? No, it is a pure largess of His bounty to which we are immensely indebted. Who would complain of a gratuity he has received? Let us, then, suppress this miserable pride which would make us ingrates, and humbly thank the Lord for the gifts He has been pleased to grant us.

In the distribution of natural talents God is not obliged to respect our fallacious principles of equality. Under no obligation to anyone, He remains absolute Master of His benefits. He is guilty of no injustice, consequently, when He gives more to some and less to others. His wisdom directs Him to bestow on each as much as is required for the charge He wills to entrust to him. " The artisan makes his instruments of the size, weight, and form best suited for the work in which he means to employ them. In the same manner, God gives us our different

minds and talents according to the service He has designed for us and the degree of glory He intends to derive therefrom.”<sup>33</sup> He demands that each and all shall fulfil the common duties of the Christian life. In addition to this, He assigns us different offices in His house: to some He entrusts the functions of the priesthood, to others those of the religious state, to others again the duties proper to seculars in this or that condition or calling. And in correspondence with this allocation of employments, He distributes His gifts of nature and grace. Above all else, He seeks the good of our souls, or rather His one exclusive object is to procure His own glory by our sanctification. And like Him, we, too, ought to see in all His gifts, natural or supernatural, only the means to glory the Giver by sanctifying ourselves.

“Now, who knows,” says St. Alphonsus, “if with greater talents, better health, a more prepossessing appearance, we should not destroy ourselves? To how many have not science, intelligence, strength, and beauty been the occasion of eternal ruin, by inspiring them with sentiments of vanity and contempt of others, or by leading them to wallow in a thousand vices? How many, on the other hand, through having been poor, ill, or deformed, have saved and sanctified themselves, who, had they been rich, vigorous, or handsome, would have been lost! We can do without beauty, wealth, and talent: one thing alone is necessary—to save our souls.”<sup>34</sup> The thought occurs to us, perhaps, that we require a certain degree of aptitude to discharge the duties of our office, and that with greater natural resources we could accomplish a greater amount of good. But as Saint-Jure justly observes: “It is much better for many, and very important for their salvation, to be deficient in intelligence, memory, and other natural gifts. Greater endowments would be their ruin; what God has given will save them. Trees are no better for having been planted in lofty

<sup>33</sup> Saint-Jure, *op. cit.*, I, iii, c. viii.

<sup>34</sup> *Conf.*, 5, 2.

places: they would have been more sheltered in the valleys. A prodigious memory that retains everything, a quick and penetrating intellect that masters all the sciences, a rare erudition, a wonderful brilliancy, an unrivalled fame: all this, often enough, only serves to nourish vanity, and thereby becomes the occasion of spiritual ruin.”<sup>35</sup> We even sometimes come across a poor victim of illusion so infatuated with his own merits that he longs for the limelight, feels jealous of those charged with certain offices, nay, slanders and endeavours to destroy them. What would become of us if we possessed greater talents? God only knows. Hence, is it not the part of wisdom to leave ourselves altogether in His hands and to depend wholly on His good-pleasure?

Is it not at least permissible to desire and to pray for these natural gifts? Most certainly, provided we do so with a right intention and with humble submission. We have spoken already of riches and health. And we shall dismiss the subject of beauty, which the Holy Ghost declares vain and deceitful. One may well have need of such or such an aptitude, and certain gifts seem particularly desirable, as, for instance, a reliable memory, a keen intellect, a sound judgment, a generous heart, a resolute will. It is therefore lawful to ask them. St. Albert the Great obtained through prayer a marvellous facility for the acquisition of knowledge. But the pious Bishop of Geneva, faithful to his constant teaching, “would have no one desire a better intellect or a better judgment.” According to him, “such desires are frivolous, and lead us to neglect the duty of cultivating such talents as we actually possess.”<sup>36</sup>

Yes, we should be more profitably employed if, instead of coveting the qualities we lack, we used to the best advantage those which God has given us. For of them He will demand a strict account; and the more He will have given the greater results He will expect. Whether

<sup>35</sup> *Conn. et Am.*, I, iii, c. viii.

<sup>36</sup> *Vie dévote*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. xxxvii.

we have received ten, five, two, or only a single talent, we must equally pay Him back both the principal and the interest. The most magnificent recompense will not always fall to the servant who has received the greatest number of talents, but to him who has made his talents, whether few or many, most productive. To merit the punishment of a wicked servant, it is not necessary to have abused one's talents, it will be enough to have hidden them. And what reward can we expect from God if we employ His gifts, not for His glory and interests, not according to His will and intention, but for ourselves alone and in our own way? "As the eyes of the servants are fixed on the hands of their masters" (*Ps. cxxii*), so should we keep the eyes of our souls constantly directed towards God, to see what He requires of us and to invoke His assistance. For His holy will is the one way that can lead us to our end, and without Him we can do nothing. Who, therefore, plays his modest part in the best manner here below? Not always he who has been most liberally endowed, but the man who makes himself most plastic in the hands of God, that is to say, who is the most humble and obedient. By means of a pliable instrument, though of little or no value in itself, God will work wonders. "Believe me," says St. Francis de Sales, "God is a great Artisan. With the meanest tools, He can produce excellent works. Ordinarily He chooses the weak to confound the strong, ignorance to confound science, that which is nothing to destroy what seems to be something. What wonders He wrought by means of a rod in the hand of Moses! By means of the jaw-bone of an ass in the hand of Samson! And was it not by the hand of a weak woman He overthrew Holophernes?"<sup>37</sup> In our own times, what prodigies of conversion has He not effected by the instrumentality of the Curé of Ars! This holy priest was far from being a genius, but he was profoundly humble. Around him were multitudes of other priests, more learned than he and with superior

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<sup>37</sup> *Esprit*, p. x.



natural endowments. But as they did not leave themselves so fully in the hands of God, they could not equal the efficiency of this modest worker.

Who turns his natural gifts to best account in the interests of his sanctification? Here, again, it is not always the most gifted, but the man of strongest faith, deepest humility, and most perfect obedience. Do we not often see men richly endowed with all kinds of natural gifts making havoc of the present life and compromising their eternity; whilst others, with less talents and culture, prove themselves infinitely more wise, because they keep their gaze directed exclusively towards God and live for Him alone? One day a holy religieuse lamented in the presence of Our Lord what she humbly termed her nullity: she was suffering more keenly than usual from the sense of her own worthlessness, when this thought came into her mind: "I can suffer and I can love. For these two things I need neither talent nor health. O my God, how good Thou art! I can then, whilst remaining in my nothingness, glorify Thee and help Thee in saving souls!" "What!" said the Blessed Egidius to St. Bonaventure. "An ignorant person like me can love God as much as the most learned of doctors?" "Yes, brother, even an illiterate old woman can love God as much as, or more than, a master in theology." Hearing this, the good brother, transported with happiness, ran into the garden and began to cry aloud: "Come, ye simple and ignorant men; come, ye poor and unlettered old women; come and let us love Our Lord. You can love Him as much as Brother Bonaventure and the greatest doctors, and even more." <sup>38</sup>

#### ARTICLE V.—EMPLOYMENTS

He who is his own master may seek an occupation suitable to his tastes and his talents, and in this he has

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<sup>38</sup> De Ségur, *Hist. Pop. de S. Fr. d'Assise*, c. iii.

only to follow the directions of Christian prudence. But in the monastery, the choice is not left to ourselves. It is obedience that bids us either remain in the ranks of the community without any particular office or take up such or such a temporal employment, such or such a spiritual charge. Here, consequently, there is scope for the practice of holy abandonment. It is in this matter most especially we should adopt the maxim of the pious Bishop of Geneva: ask nothing, desire nothing, refuse nothing. We should desire nothing, that is to say, except to accomplish perfectly the will of God, and we should fear nothing except to follow our own wills. Two dangers have here to be guarded against: we may expose ourselves to peril by seeking employments, or we may fail in obedience by refusing them.

Is it not our wisest course to desire nothing, to ask nothing, but to keep ourselves in a holy indifference, on account of the uncertainty wherein we are placed? We know not whether it would be more in accordance with the divine will and more advantageous for our souls to be entrusted with some office or to be left without special employment. In the second case, we should escape many dangers and responsibilities; we should be entirely free to devote ourselves to God alone, to consecrate all our time to the sweet and holy occupations of Mary, to the administration of the little kingdom within us. This would not mean a sinecure, but very strenuous, constant toil. Should we always have the patience and the courage to apply ourselves to it with persevering energy? Or should we, like folk having nothing to do, amuse our leisure with idle fancies and occupy ourselves with matters that do not concern us? Anyhow, we should lose the thousand opportunities for sacrifice and holy zeal to be met with in employments. On the other hand, the duties attaching to an office would yield us an abundant harvest of mortifications, worries and humiliations. The very name of charges, which we give to employments and offices, indicates that they are a burden, sometimes a very

heavy burden, for those who fulfil them conscientiously. And on this account they become a means of sanctification by the sacrifices they impose. Spiritual charges, besides, have a very special advantage. They impose on us the happy obligation of breaking frequently the bread of God's word, of coming into daily contact with holy souls, and of practising the apostolate of good example. But they also entail heavy responsibilities. For if the flock does not show the improvement expected, the shepherds are the first to be called to account by the Sovereign Master. Moreover, is there not reason to fear that we should allow ourselves to become absorbed in temporal cares, to the prejudice of the spiritual, that we should forget our own souls in our solicitude for others, that we should neglect the duties of community life, and that we should see in our particular employments only an excuse for taking liberties and indulging nature? In short, these and such-like considerations ought to make us very cautious in our desires. They should rather dispose us to pray after this manner: "My God, is it more profitable for Thy glory and for my sanctification that I should be in office, or be left without special employment? I know nothing about it, but Thou art omniscient. In Thee I place all my trust. Arrange matters, I implore Thee, in the way most advantageous for our common interests. As for me, I have no will but Thine."

Does this mean that we are forbidden to have a desire and to express it with filial submission? Certainly not. However, this is a very delicate matter, and requires to be closely examined. As St. Alphonsus has justly observed: "If you desire to choose, always choose the charges that are least agreeable."<sup>39</sup> St. Francis de Sales expresses himself in much the same terms: "When the choice is allowed us, the most desirable occupations should be those which are the meanest and most disagreeable, those which give us the opportunity of doing most and humbling ourselves most for God." But even

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<sup>39</sup> *Vér. ép.*, c. vii.

when accompanied with such dispositions, the desire would be still suspect to the holy Doctor. How do you know, he asks, if, after desiring lowly offices, you will have the strength to love the abjection you shall find therein, and to endure without repining all the disgust and the bitterness, the mortifications and the humiliations there awaiting you? In fact, according to him, we ought to regard as a temptation the desire for any office, let it be what it may, but more especially when there is question of some honourable charge.<sup>40</sup> "With regard to such as aspire after more important employments," says Rodriguez, "than those committed to them, in the belief that they would there do more good, these persons labour under a strange illusion if they think their desires come from disinterested zeal for the glory of God and their neighbour's salvation. The truth is, desires of this nature betray a secret ambition, a longing for human esteem, consideration, and a comfortable life. They indicate also that the employment we yearn for will bring us more credit or is more in harmony with our tastes than that in which we are actually occupied. . . . If you were really humble you would wish to see high dignities and important charges given to others rather than to yourself, because you would be convinced that there can be nobody less worthy of them than you or more likely to make them an occasion of vanity."<sup>41</sup>

Let us conclude, therefore, with St. Francis de Sales, that it is always better to desire nothing, but to place ourselves absolutely in the hands of Providence. Wherefore should we desire one thing rather than another? Provided we please God and love His holy will, we ought to be content, especially in religion, where it is obedience that measures the worth of everything. Let us hold ourselves in readiness to accept whatever charges may be assigned us. "Whether abject or honourable, we should humbly receive them, without saying a word unless we are questioned. And in that case, we should speak the

<sup>40</sup> *Entret.*, vi et xxi.

<sup>41</sup> *Perf. Chrét.*, 8<sup>e</sup>, c. xiv.

truth simply as we know it.”<sup>42</sup> We could not give God a more magnificent proof of our love and confidence than by permitting Him to dispose of us according to His designs, saying to Him in the words of the Psalmist: “My destiny is in Thy hands” (Ps. xxx, 16). This thought should preserve us always in peace, and we should desire to know nothing more.

But when the superior has spoken, it is God Who has declared to us His will. He is not satisfied with merely manifesting His good-pleasure by the sequence of events. He has signified what He requires of us by the mouth of His *Alter Ego*. The Lord had already the most absolute rights to our obedience. But by our religious profession we contracted new obligations in His regard; and at the same time we gave ourselves to the community. The superior is officially charged, in God’s name and in the name of the community, to exact from us that which we promised them under vow. And is it not one of our engagements to allow the superior to dispose of us according to the tenor of our holy rule? Whether he leaves us unemployed, or entrusts us with some charge, or removes us from our occupation: all that belongs to his office, and we are obliged to be faithful to our promise. He prays for light, he consults, he reflects, and then decides according to his conscience and his resources and in the spirit of the rule. He is answerable to none but God and the higher superiors. He is not obliged to ask our consent or even to give us his reasons. Besides, it is his duty, it is as much his interest as ours, to have in view above all things the good of souls. And God Who appoints us through him to an office will put His grace at our disposal. Consequently, setting aside both our tastes and our repugnances, let us courageously go whither He bids us, assured that He will never deprive us of His help.

We have no right to refuse an employment on the ground that it is too mean. There can be nothing meaner

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<sup>42</sup> *Loc. cit.*

or more contemptible than pride and the want of virtue. And in the service of the Most High no office should be reputed mean. The most insignificant actions are of inestimable worth in His eyes, when they have been ennobled by faith, love, and devotion. Our Blessed Lady far surpassed the very Seraphim, because she sanctified by the holiest dispositions the most modest of occupations. Moreover, the community is a living body which needs its full complement of organs. It must have a head, but it must also have hands and feet. With what right could we wish to be the head rather than the feet, the eyes rather than the hands? When we despise an occupation as inferior to our merits, we show ourselves wanting in humility; and therefore God wills to give us an employment that shall facilitate for us its acquisition. Let us, then, serve Him with generosity in an office that is calculated to wound our pride of spirit and our delicate sensibility, and so we shall give Him the best possible proof of our affectionate devotion to His interests.

Neither have we the right to refuse an office because we consider it above our capacity. That would be strange humility, calculated to destroy obedience and to make us forget our obligations. It is for the superior, not for us, to judge of our aptitude. He takes upon himself all the responsibility for his choice of us, and leaves to us only that of obedience. We should undoubtedly have cause for fear if we sought the charge, if it were assigned us at our own solicitation. But since the appointment has come from God, He will not forsake us. And, as St. Francis de Sales reminded us in the preceding chapter, "God is a skilful Artisan" Who can perform wonderful works with the poorest of instruments. Talent is precious when combined with virtue. But what God especially requires in His instruments is suppleness and pliability; in other words, humility and obedience. Furthermore, He does not demand success from us; He will be satisfied if we do the best we can.

Finally, we have no right to refuse an employment on

the plea, *too easily alleged*, that it would be dangerous for our souls. On this point St. Alphonsus says : " Do not think yourself justified before God in refusing an office on account of the faults you are afraid you will commit therein. By entering religion we obliged ourselves to render the community every service in our power. But if the fear of sin could excuse us, that excuse would be available always and for everybody. Then, on whom could the community depend for service or administration ? Make a firm resolution to accomplish the will of God, and His help shall never fail you." <sup>43</sup>

" Is it not better, then, to allow God to dispose of us according to His designs, to await whatever charge He may be pleased to impose on us, and whatsoever it may be to receive it in humble silence ? It is possible, however, that certain employments may really be above our capacity, or too much in harmony with our natural inclinations, or even dangerous for our souls. In that case, it is only reasonable, and perhaps very necessary, to acquaint the superior with the circumstances, of which he may be ignorant. But we must do this with all the humility, resignation, and meekness prescribed by our Cistercian rules in analogous cases. Nevertheless, should the superior, despite our respectful representations, insist on our acceptance, let us bow to God's will with loving submission, persuaded that obedience is best for us. We should, however, form a resolution to keep a very careful watch over ourselves, trusting to the assistance of grace, and to be faithful to the duty of keeping the superior informed of our conduct." <sup>44</sup>

Let us conclude this article with the following important passage from Rodriguez : " What God considers in us during the present life is not the greater or lesser importance of the office we hold in the community : whether one is superior, preacher, porter or sacristan makes no difference to Him : but it is the manner in which

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<sup>43</sup> *Perf. Chrét.*, 8<sup>e</sup>, c. xv.

<sup>44</sup> Lehodey, *Directoire Spirituel*, s. vii, c. i.

each of us acquits himself of his charge. If the porter performs his duties with better dispositions than the superior, he is more agreeable to God than the superior, and shall receive a greater reward. Do not desire, therefore, the gifts which Providence has withheld from you, or the more important positions in the house. Apply yourself solely to the business of acting the part assigned you to the very best of your ability, and making the most of the talents you have received,"<sup>45</sup> in order to glorify God by your sanctification. Consequently, you should never, under the pretext of special employment, neglect the common observance of the interior life. You should rather administer your office in the light of eternity, under the eyes of God. And you should keep yourself in strict obedience and humility, and turn the duties and difficulties of your charge to account for your progress in virtue. This is the essential thing, the one thing necessary, the most precious of all advantages.

#### ARTICLE VI.—REPOSE AND TRANQUILLITY

Certain employments, spiritual or temporal, are attended with a world of trouble, fatigue, and solicitude. We no longer belong to ourselves; people are continually disturbing us in the midst of our work, our prayer, and our spiritual reading. Other employments, on the contrary, impose but little labour, and leave us comparatively free from worries and distractions. This immunity, of course, we also enjoy, and in still greater degree, if we have no special employment.

Repose and tranquillity are eminently conducive to regular observance and the interior life. They give us an opportunity of attending at leisure to our own souls and of keeping ourselves uninterruptedly united to God. But we may become inordinately attached to them, so that we feel a certain difficulty in renouncing them when we have

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<sup>45</sup> *Op. cit.*, 8<sup>o</sup> tr., c. xv.



to fulfil the duties of our office or devote ourselves to the service of the community. The love of repose and tranquillity, very legitimate in itself, is then excessive: has degenerated into a vulgar egoism. It is no longer disinterested or devoted. Consequently, it extinguishes the flame of true charity and renders us useless alike to ourselves and to others.

The troubles, solitudes, and continual distractions incidental to certain offices provide us with countless opportunities for sacrifice and renunciation. They constitute a perfect Calvary for him who wants to die to self, demanding as they do the constant immolation of the individual for the benefit of the community. On the other hand, it is very easy amid the turmoil of affairs and worries to neglect our souls and to allow the supernatural too little influence on our activities. Nevertheless, if we have the good-will to take the trouble, we can by vigilance preserve purity of intention, we can from time to time raise our hearts to God, and keep ourselves sufficiently recollected. Never has anyone been more busily occupied than St. Bernard, St. Teresa the Elder, St. Alphonsus, and so many other saints. One wonders how they could have found it possible, amid so many labours and solitudes, to compose their immortal works, to consecrate so much time to prayer, and to be such perfect contemplatives. Still, they managed it.

What does God require of us? Should we make better progress amid the distractions of office or in tranquillity and repose? God alone possesses that knowledge. We shall therefore be acting in accordance with wisdom by establishing ourselves in a holy indifference and keeping ourselves ready for whatever He decides. As members of a Contemplative Order, we have indeed the right to long for peace and tranquillity, in order to live more easily in familiar intercourse with our Divine Master. St. Peter spoke the truth when he declared that it was good for him to be on Mount Thabor: he would have liked to remain there for ever, near his sweet Saviour and

under the same tent. He qualified his prayer, nevertheless, with the words: "Lord, if Thou willest." We also must add to our petitions for continued repose: "Lord, if Thou willest." But does He will it? Here on earth we shall nowhere find a permanent Thabor. We have need of a Calvary and a crucifixion. Nor have we the right to choose our own crosses, and to tell the Lord He must not lay any others upon us. If He has selected for us the crosses that abound in such or such an employment, let us accept them with all confidence. For He is infallible Wisdom and the most affectionate of fathers. It is just this trial we needed to make us die to ourselves. Another of our own choosing would certainly not have corresponded to our requirements.

There is here a combination of God's good-pleasure and His signified will. So far as it depends upon us, so far as we can do so without prejudice to any of our obligations, we ought to love, desire, and seek after peace and tranquillity, and, so to speak, create around us an atmosphere of recollection and calm. Such is the spirit of our vocation. But if it pleases God to demand from us a sacrifice, and to place us in the midst of distractions and worries, we have not the right to refuse. Let us only contrive as best we can to preserve, even under these circumstances, the interior spirit, silence, and union with Our Lord. And whenever we happen to find a moment of leisure, let us eagerly avail of it to return to our accustomed recollection.

So acted our holy father, St. Bernard. Often the command of the Supreme Pontiff imposed on him the obligation of prolonged absences from his monastery and of intervention in the tumult of public affairs. He always hastened home with an insatiable desire to be alone with God. Nevertheless, his first care was to visit the noviciate to see his new children and to nourish them with the milk of the divine word. He then gave himself to the professed religious, and poured out upon them his consolations the more abundantly for that they had been deprived of

them so long. His first thought was for his children; he himself was the last to be considered. "Charity never seeks her own interests," he said. "It is now a long time since I made it my rule to put your interests before everything else. that is dear to me. Prayer, reading, writing, meditation, and all the other practices of piety I have counted as loss for the love I bear you. I am well content to take Lia for Rachel. I have no regret in abandoning the sweets of contemplation when, after our conferences, I see the irritable brother become meek, the proud humble, the faint-hearted full of courage. Let Christ's little ones use me as they please, provided only they derive benefit to their souls. They will spare me most by not sparing me at all. My repose consists in seeing that they have no fear of importuning me in their necessities. I am always at their disposal, ready to give them all the assistance in my power. And so long as I have the breath of life so long will I continue to serve God by ministering to His children with charity unfeigned." <sup>46</sup>

St. Francis de Sales taught and practised the same charity. Whenever anyone approached him, even a mere child, the Saint assumed the respectful air of a subordinate before a superior. He put nobody off; he never refused to speak or listen, nor would he show the least sign of impatience when people wasted his precious time with their frivolous chatter. He would simply say to himself: "This is God's will for me. What more do I want? Whilst I am engaged in this action, I am not obliged to be doing any other. The will of God is our centre. Away from that we find nothing but trouble and uneasiness." <sup>47</sup> St. Jane de Chantal assures us that even when overwhelmed with work he appeared always closely united to God, loving His holy will equally in all things, and that by this means what in itself was most repugnant to his tastes became for him a source of delight." <sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Serm. in Cant.*, li et lii. <sup>47</sup> *Esprit*, 1<sup>re</sup> P., 15. <sup>48</sup> *Vie*, append.

## CHAPTER V

### ON ABANDONMENT IN WHAT BELONGS TO THE OPINION OF OTHERS

#### ARTICLE I.—REPUTATION

**V**ERY dear to us is our reputation, particularly our reputation with our superiors and our community.

We attach the highest value to their confidence and esteem. Besides, we may have need of their good opinion for the administration of our office. Now, it happens not seldom that, whether from a laudable or blameworthy motive, whether justly or unjustly, others speak ill of us. This is no small trial. The Psalmist many times complains of it to God. He knew well “the contradiction of tongues,” “the children of men whose teeth are weapons and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword,” “the wicked and deceitful tongues, like devastating coals, like sharp arrows shot by strong arms” (*Ps.* xxx, 21; lvi, 5; cxix, 4).

If these arrows, whether shot at us openly or from cover, should injure our reputation, we ought always to endure the wrong with patience, conforming ourselves to the divine good-pleasure. For we must see, behind the human agents, God alone Who employs these men as His instruments, whether or not they are conscious of the fact. He will one day hold them to a strict account, and will render to them according to their works. Meanwhile He avails Himself of their zeal, their thoughtlessness, even their malice, to put us to the trial. Our reputation belongs to Him. Therefore He has the right to dispose of it as He pleases. It may seem to us that we require it for the proper discharge of our duties. But He knows best what is most conducive to the interests of His glory, to the good of souls, and to our own spiritual advance-

ment. And if He has determined to try us in this manner, it belongs to Him to choose for His purpose whatever instrument He prefers. So, despite the complaints and protests of nature, let us, deliberately forgetting the visible, proximate causes, confine our attention to God. Let us kiss with filial submission the hand that smites us in love, and devote ourselves diligently to the task of gathering the fruits of sanctification which this trial is meant to produce.

Such trials afford us rare opportunities of advancing in many solid virtues. The soul, detaching herself from her reputation, rises above human opinion to God alone, in order to serve Him henceforth with perfect purity of intention. Humility grows strong and strikes its roots more deeply by accepting this cruel affliction; for then the just man despises himself and willingly bears with the contempt of others. Meekness acquires new energy from suppressing the uprisings of anger, and patience from moderating the sadness engendered by the wrongs we endure. How beautiful, how sublime is the charity of him who pardons all injustices, loves his enemies, speaks of them without bitterness, and renders them good for evil! Confidence in God flourishes in the tranquillity with which we bear our cross, and the love of Our Lord in the fidelity wherewith we continue to serve Him as before. One very precious fruit that we shall often reap from such trials will be the vanquishing of evil with good. And we shall always enjoy the beatitude promised to those who are perfectly meek, merciful, and peace-loving.

In sending us trials of this nature, God wills to make us humble of heart, in accordance with the example and teaching of the Lamb and His faithful friends. "Has there ever been a reputation so besmirched as that of Jesus Christ? What injuries He had to endure! What calumnies were uttered against Him! Nevertheless, the Father has given Him a Name above all names, and exalted Him in the measure in which He was humbled

by men. And did not the Apostles go forth exulting from the assemblies where they had suffered insult and injury for the Name of Jesus? For it is in truth a glory to suffer for so worthy a cause. I understand it well—that we want to endure nothing but spectacular persecutions, so that our vanity may find its account even in our sufferings! We should like a glorious crucifixion. But, think you, when the holy martyrs were supporting so many cruel torments, were they encouraged by the applause of the spectators? On the contrary, they were cursed and execrated. Alas! How few are willing to sacrifice their reputation to the interests of His glory Who suffered such an ignominious death on the cross in order to merit for us a glory that shall never fade!”<sup>1</sup>

So speaks St. Francis de Sales. And he adds: “What, then, is reputation that so many make an idol of it? After all, it is nothing better than a dream, a shadow, an opinion, a little smoke, a little praise the memory whereof perishes with the sound, an esteem often so false that many are astonished to find themselves censured for defects they do not possess, and commended for virtues to which they are conscious of having the opposite vices.” Sometimes the Saint was informed that people maligned him and circulated monstrous and scandalous reports about him. Instead of defending himself, he gently replied: “Is that all they say? Well, then they can’t know everything about me. Really, they flatter me. They are too indulgent. I clearly understand that they desire to judge me better than I am. God be praised! I must correct myself. If I don’t deserve to be censured, perhaps, for these particular faults, I certainly do for many others. And it is always a mercy that I am censured so kindly.”<sup>2</sup>

But no matter how thorough may be our detachment from reputation and our abandonment to God in all that concerns it, we must not neglect to guard it with reasonable care. This is the explicit counsel of the Wise Man, and consequently appertains to the signified will

<sup>1</sup> *Esprit*, x, 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xii, 4.

of God. "Good fame," according to St. Francis de Sales, "is one of the foundations of human society. Without it, we are not only useless but positively harmful to the public by reason of the scandal it takes. Charity, therefore, enjoins, and humility approves, that we desire and guard it as something precious. Apart from this, it is always very useful for the preservation of the virtues, particularly whilst they are tender and weak. The obligation to guard our good name and to merit esteem constrains us with a powerful yet gentle violence to exercise a generous courage. We must not, however, show ourselves too ardent, exacting, and punctilious in this matter of reputation. Contempt of injuries and slanders is a much better remedy than impatience. Despise them and they disappear; get angry and you only seem thereby to acknowledge the faults imputed to you. We should be jealous of our good name, yes, but not to the point of idolatry. And if we must not offend the eyes of the just, neither must we aim at pleasing those of the wicked."<sup>3</sup>

"We should be ready to give up idle conversations, useless customs, frivolous friendships, dissipating company, when these injure our reputation. For our good name is worth more to us than all such vain amusements. But if people murmur against us, rebuke us, or slander us on account of our practices of piety, our endeavours to advance in devotion, our progress in the path to paradise; let us make no answer, but keep our eyes constantly fixed on our crucified Saviour. He will protect our reputation. But if He permits us to be deprived of it, He will do so only in order to replace it with a better one, or to establish us more securely in humility, one degree of which is worth more than all the honours in the world. If we are unjustly blamed, let us peacefully oppose the truth to the calumny. Should the calumny continue, let us continue to humble ourselves, thus committing our reputations with our souls to the care of God.

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<sup>3</sup> *Vie dévote*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. vii.

Nowhere can we find better security. I except, however, certain crimes, so atrocious and infamous that no one should endure to be charged with them, provided he can justly refute the accusation. I except also certain persons on whose good name depends the edification of others. In these cases we should insist calmly on reparation of the wrong that has been done.”<sup>4</sup>

These are the words of St. Francis de Sales to Philotheus, and they describe the practice he followed himself. He required that the episcopal dignity should be respected even in his own person; but was quite indifferent otherwise to esteem or contempt, and was equally unconcerned whether people praised or censured him. He defended himself modestly against certain slanders which were calculated to compromise his sacred ministry, but as a general rule he appeared insensible to injuries and to the unfavourable opinions people had of him. He even found amusement in the thought of such injustices, a thing exceedingly rare. “Those who complain of slander,” he said, “are entirely too sensitive. It is only a cross of words blown about by the wind. One must have a very delicate ear and a very tender skin if one cannot bear the buzzing and bite of a fly.” When assailed with serious slanders, he fixed his gaze upon the Saviour dying as a criminal on the cross, between two robbers. “He is the true brazen serpent. If we look at Him we shall be cured of the wounds inflicted by the tongue of the asp. In presence of so great an example, we shall be ashamed to utter complaints, much more to foster ill-feeling against our calumniators.”<sup>5</sup> He also called to mind the Last Judgment, where each of us shall be awarded what he deserves. In the meantime, it mattered little that men found fault with him, provided he pleased his beloved Master. He would not even permit others to undertake his defence. “Have I given you power of attorney to indulge in anger on my behalf?” he com-

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<sup>4</sup> *Vie dévote*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. vii.

<sup>5</sup> *Lettre*, 424.



plained to one of his would-be apologists. "Say no more. It is only a wordy cross, a tribulation of wind. Quite possibly, my detractors see my faults better than those who love me. They are our true friends, rather than our enemies, since they co-operate with us in the destroying of our self-love." Thus, indifferent to commendation and contempt, he abandoned himself to the care of Divine Providence, ready to do his duty in good fame or evil, and desiring only that reputation which God willed he should have for the interests of His service and glory.<sup>6</sup>

Even when they could have refuted the slanders, and seemed almost obliged to do so, the saints often preferred to keep silence, after the example of Christ in His Passion, and to leave to Providence the care of justifying them, if such were the divine good-pleasure. St. Gerard Magella, amongst many others, is a memorable instance. "An unworthy creature charged him with a horrible crime. Disquieted and alarmed, St. Alphonsus sent for the accused, informed him of the accusation, and asked him what he had to say in self-defence. Impassive as a marble statue, Gerard answered never a word. St. Alphonsus thereupon forbade him to approach the altar or to associate with his fellow-religious. Gerard uttered no complaint. The fathers, convinced of his innocence, urged him to justify himself. 'There is a God,' he replied, 'and it is for Him to attend to that.' And when they counselled him at least to ask permission to communicate in order to have some consolation in his martyrdom, 'No,' he said, 'let us rather die under the pressure of the divine will.' Five days afterwards, content with having made Gerard, like His own Divine Son, 'the opprobrium of men,' God manifested his innocence. The unhappy woman who had accused him retracted the calumny, avowing that she had acted under the inspiration of the demon. His justification mattered no more to Gerard than the accusation. When St. Alphonsus

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<sup>6</sup> *Esprit*, x, 15, et xii, 4-7; *Vie*, I, v; *Lettre*, 424.

asked why he had refused to exculpate himself, he received this sublime answer: ' Father, does not our rule ordain that we should never excuse ourselves, but suffer every kind of mortification in silence?' " " " Assuredly, the rule did not oblige in the circumstances, and this example is rather to be admired than imitated. But how it puts to shame our excessive sensibility!

## ARTICLE II.—HUMILIATIONS

Humility is the virtue most strongly antipathetic to our natural feelings. But its importance is vital and its influence supremely beneficent. By removing the main obstacle, it facilitates the progress of the soul. It gives us strength and security in dangers, in illusions, in trials, because it knows how to be distrustful of self and how to pray. It makes us agreeable to all around us, because under its influence we show ourselves submissive to our superiors, meek and obliging towards our equals, kind and considerate in our relations with our inferiors. It makes us pleasing to our heavenly Father, because it puts us in the proper attitude of creatures in presence of His Divine Majesty and supreme authority. It impresses on us a touching resemblance to our Brother, our Friend, the Spouse of our souls, Jesus meek and humble of heart. Is He not humility personified? He attracts the humble and repels the proud. " The humble He protects and delivers, the humble He loves and consoles, to the humble He inclines and communicates His graces in abundance, and after he has been depressed exalts him in glory; to the humble He reveals His secrets, and sweetly invites and attracts him to Himself." So speaks the author of the *Imitation* (I, II, c. iii). Very clear and precise are the words of the Master: " He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he that exalteth himself shall be humbled " (*Matt.* xxxiii, 12). If, then, we have the noble

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<sup>7</sup> Berthe, *op. cit.*, I, iii, c. viii.

ambition to merit each day something more of God's friendship and intimacy, the surest way to raise ourselves in His esteem is to lower ourselves in our own by humility. To how few, alas ! is this secret known ! There are many to whom can be applied the words of the Psalmist : " In his heart he hath disposed to ascend " (Ps. lxxxiii, 6); they are preoccupied almost solely with the thought of ascending when they should rather be thinking of descending. Ah, how profitable it would be for them to meditate on the profound answer made by St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus to one of her novices : " When I think of all I have to acquire ! " " Say rather *of all you have to lose*. I see you are on the wrong road ; consequently you will never reach your journey's end. You want to climb a mountain, whereas God wants you to descend : He is actually waiting for you below in the valley of humility. . . . The one way to make rapid progress in the life of love is to remain always little. That is what I have done myself." <sup>8</sup>

There are many roads leading to humility. We have ourselves particular confidence in that of humiliations, because, according to the beautiful expression of St. Bernard : " Humiliation leads to humility, just as patience leads to peace and study to knowledge." <sup>9</sup> Would you like to ascertain if your humility is genuine, to what point it has attained, whether it is going forward or backward ? You can learn all this from the manner in which you support your humiliations. When rightly accepted, they push us vigorously forward. Sometimes we make prodigious progress by their help, and without them perfect humility is impossible. " Do you desire to possess the virtue of humility ? " asks St. Bernard. " If so, you must not flee from the way of humiliation. For if you cannot endure to be brought down by humiliation you do not deserve to be lifted up by humility." <sup>10</sup>

According to St. Francis de Sales, there are two ways

<sup>8</sup> *Histoire, Conseils et Souv.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ep.*, 87.

of practising humiliation. The one is passive : it depends on the divine good-pleasure and forms part of the object of abandonment. The other is active, and falls under the signified will of God.<sup>11</sup> Most people content themselves with the latter, having a repugnance to the former. They consent to humble themselves, but not to be humbled by others. That is a serious mistake.

Self-humiliation is undoubtedly very important ; and we should always give the preference to those practices thereof which are most in conformity with our vocation and most opposed to our natural instincts. St. Francis de Sales would have us never use the language of humility unless it came from our hearts, for otherwise " this kind of talk is nothing but a very refined sublimate of pride : in order to obtain the glory of being reputed humble, we imitate the oarsmen who keep their backs turned to the destination for which they are striving. That is to say, without perhaps being conscious of the fact, we run full-sail before the wind on the sea of vanity." <sup>12</sup> Let us, therefore, practise self-humiliation, not in words but in deeds. The best form of active humiliation for religious is that which consists in loyal submission to our rules, our superiors, and even our brethren. Everyone knows that St. Benedict's twelve degrees of humility are almost exclusively exercises of obedience. It is in the same virtue of obedience St. Francis de Sales finds the criterion of true humility, supporting himself on the words of St. Paul to the effect that Our Lord annihilated Himself by becoming perfectly obedient. " Do you see," he asks, " how we ought to measure our humility ? By obedience. If you obey with promptitude, sincerity, and joy, you are truly humble. For without true humility it is impossible to have true obedience. Obedience requires us to be submissive, and he that is truly humble renders himself inferior and subject to every creature for the love of Jesus Christ. All his

<sup>11</sup> *Esprit*, xvi, 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

neighbours he regards as his superiors, considering himself as the reproach of men and the offscouring of the world." <sup>13</sup>

It is also an excellent humiliation to open our hearts without reserve to those who are charged with our spiritual direction, giving them a faithful account of our temptations, our evil propensities, and generally of all the disorders of our souls. Still another salutary practice is to accuse ourselves of our external faults to our superiors, as if to God Himself, and with contrite and humble hearts to accept the penances customary in our monasteries. Besides these humiliations prescribed by the rule, there are many others which we may adopt of our own free choice. Yet as to these, St. Francis recommends the exercise of great discretion, "because self-love can here insinuate itself in a very subtle and imperceptible manner. He put in the sixth rank the seeking for humiliations that did not come to us from outside. He had a much higher esteem for the humiliations that are not of our own choosing." <sup>14</sup>

And in truth the humiliations we procure for ourselves are always too delicate and too infrequent to cause the destruction of self-love. What we require is that others should put us to shame, should bluntly tell us the truth about ourselves, should expose us, should repeatedly denounce us, and make us feel the world of misery and corruption that is seething within us. That is the reason why God deprives us of health, weakens our natural faculties, leaves us in helplessness and darkness, or afflicts us with other interior trials. That is why He buffets us by the hand of Satan, why He moves our superiors to reprehend us, and has imposed on the community the obligation of co-operating with us, according to our usages, in the correction of our faults. It is especially through our associates that He subjects us to the painful but salutary action of humiliation. He employs

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<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, x, 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Loc. cit.*

all in this enterprise, making use of both enlightened and bitter zeal, virtues and defects, good intentions, frailties, and even malice itself. Men are only His responsible instruments; and He will punish or reward them according to their works in His own good time. Let us allow Him this directive rôle. And attending only to Him our God, our Saviour, our Friend par excellence, let us forget whatever may be disagreeable to nature, and accept as from His hand this very beneficial, if distasteful, treatment of humiliations. Generally, they are light and passing. But if they were more painful and enduring, they would also be, through the mercy of God, in fuller measure "a compensation for our sins of the past, a title to the pardon of our daily offences, a remedy for our infirmities, a treasure of merits and virtues, a proof of our loyal devotion to God, the purchase-price of intimate relations with Him, and the means of our perfection."

Humiliations foster pride when they are rejected with anger or accepted with discontent. This fact explains why "so many are humbled without becoming humble," as St. Bernard remarks. He alone profits by his humiliations who receives them with welcome; and he profits the more according as he receives them the more humbly, as from the hand of God, saying to himself, for example: "I have richly deserved this confusion, and have also great need of it. Since a slight offence, a little want of consideration, a disagreeable word suffices to fill me with trouble and agitation, pride must still be living and vigorous in my heart. Hence, far from regarding the humiliation as an evil, I ought rather to look upon it as a remedy; I ought to bless God Who deigns to cure me; and I ought to feel thankful to my brethren for the assistance they give me in conquering self-love. And besides, what I should really consider a proper subject for shame, confusion, and humiliation, is to feel myself still so full of pride, after my many years spent in the service of the King of the humble." Ah! if we but clearly realised our past transgressions and our present miseries,

we should find it easy enough to convince ourselves that no creature can ever make us endure as much contempt, injury, and disgrace as we deserve. And instead of murmuring when God sends us humiliations, we should rather thank Him as for a wonderful favour, since in return for our acceptance of a slight and transient confusion, He conceals from nearly all mortal eyes the view of our countless miseries, and spares us the everlasting confusion of the lost. Let us not say that we are guiltless in the present instance. For there are doubtless many faults to our charge which have never been punished, and the expiation thereof is not the less due because so long deferred.

St. Peter, the martyr, unjustly cast into prison, complained thus to Our Lord: "What crime have I committed to deserve such punishment?" "And for what crime have I been nailed to the cross?" answered the Crucified.<sup>15</sup> The Church sings of Him that He "alone is holy, alone is Lord, alone Most High with the Holy Ghost in the glory of the Father." Nevertheless, "He came unto His own and His own did not receive Him" (*John* i, 11). Rather did they overwhelm Him with outrages and subjected Him to all kinds of ill-treatment. They accused Him, condemned Him, preferred to Him a murderer, crucified Him between two robbers, and insulted Him even on the cross. He was the despised of the despised, the very last of men. His adorable Face was bruised with blows, defiled with spittle. He did not turn it away from His tormentors, nor did He utter a single word of reproach, but adored in silence the will of His Father, which He knew to be perfectly just, and lovingly accepted it, because He saw Himself laden with the sins of the world. And we, His wretched creatures, guilty of so many crimes, should we regard it as a dishonour to participate in the humiliations of the Son of God, and to receive them in humble silence? Would such conduct be generous or even just? Rather would it not be

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<sup>15</sup> St. Lig., *Vér. ép.*, c. viii.

shameful? How could we please Him Who is meek and humble of heart so long as such pride reigned in us? Would He not have the right to say to us: "I have been despised, calumniated, treated as a fool; and you would still desire to be esteemed, you would still be sensitive to insult!"

Besides, love always aims at producing a resemblance between the lovers. In proportion, therefore, as we advance in the love of Jesus, we submit with greater willingness, and come in time to submit with gladness to participate in His humiliations, injuries and reproaches. Then "love causes us to regard as a great favour, as a singular honour, all affronts, calumnies, insults and reproaches, from whatever side they come. It makes us abandon, renounce, and reject every other glory save the glory which proceeds from our well-beloved Crucified. For the sake of that glory, we exult in abjection, in abnegation, in the annihilation of ourselves, and the only emblems of majesty we desire are Our Saviour's crown of thorns, the reed He was given for a sceptre, the mantle of shame laid upon Him in contempt, and the throne of His cross, whereon His lovers experience more content, more joy, more glory and more happiness than did Solomon upon his throne of ivory."<sup>16</sup>

In these words St. Francis de Sales describes for us his own dispositions. He recognised in the contempt and injuries he had to endure the holy will of God, and immediately conformed himself thereto. He seemed insensible to the wrongs done him, harbouring no resentment against his enemies, and always ready to grant their reasonable requests. According to his own expression, if they plucked out one of his eyes, he would continue to look at them affectionately with the other. He was once challenged to a public debate by a Protestant minister, notorious for the bitterness of his venomous tongue. "Good!" he exclaimed. "This is just what I need. Was not Our Lord saturated with reproaches? My only

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<sup>16</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, xi, c. xix.



desire is that God should obtain glory out of my humiliation. If I am brazenly insulted, He shall be magnificently exalted. You shall see conversions by the score: 'a thousand falling on the left, and six thousand on the right.' " <sup>17</sup> St. Francis of Assisi entertained the same sentiments. One day he came to a place where he was well received. "Let us depart," he said to his companions; "we have nothing to gain here, where people treat us with honour. Our profit is to be found only amongst those who censure and despise us." <sup>18</sup>

### ARTICLE III.—PERSECUTIONS FROM THE GOOD

Persecutions may come from the wicked or from the just. "To be despised, reprehended, and accused by sinners is a joy to a man of courage," says St. Francis de Sales. "But to be reprehended, accused, and ill-treated by good people, by one's friends and relatives: Ah, this is in truth the test of virtue. As the sting of a honey-bee causes more pain than the bite of a common insect, so the troubles and contradictions we have to endure from well-meaning folk are more bitter than any others." <sup>19</sup> St. Peter of Alcantara, full of compassion for St. Teresa, assured her that one of the greatest afflictions we can suffer in this place of exile was the trial she had experienced, that is to say, opposition from the good. Is it because we value more highly the esteem and affection of such persons? Is it because this trial is more unexpected? Or is it because, being just, these people act according to their conscience, and believe it their duty to show no consideration for our feelings? Whatever be the origin and circumstances of these bitter trials, the following reflections will help us to sanctify them. <sup>20</sup>

"All the saints have suffered persecution in this life,"

<sup>17</sup> *Vie*, I, v; *Esprit*, i, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ségur, *Oeuvres de St. Fr. d'Assisi*, Max. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Vie dévote*, 3<sup>e</sup> P., c. iii.

<sup>20</sup> St. Thér., *Vie*, xxx.

says St. Alphonsus. "Think of St. Basil, accused of heresy before Pope St. Damasus; St. Cyril, condemned as a heretic by a council of forty bishops, and then ignominiously deposed; St. Athanasius, pursued with accusations of witchcraft; St. John Chrysostom, charged with immorality. Think of St. Romuald: he was above a hundred years old, yet was accused of a crime so execrable that people wanted to burn him alive. Think of St. Francis de Sales: for three years he was believed to have lived in criminal relations with a worldly person, and waited three years for God to clear his reputation. Think finally of St. Lidwine, into whose chamber a wretched woman one day intruded and vomited against her a thousand reproaches, each more scandalous than the preceding."<sup>21</sup> Everyone knows how our holy father, St. Benedict, narrowly missed being poisoned by his monks, and how the founders of Cîteaux had to suffer both from their brethren in Molesme and from other religious of their time. It was the same with the Abbot John de la Barrière and Abbot de Rancé when they undertook to establish their reforms. St. Francis of Assisi resigned his office of superior because of the opposition he encountered from his disciples: his vicar-general, Brother Elias, had the effrontery to accuse him before a large number of the religious of ruining their Institute. This same Elias caused St. Anthony of Padua to be cast into prison. St. Ignatius of Loyola suffered the humiliation of being confined in the dungeons of the Holy Office. St. John of the Cross, after reforming Carmel, was locked up in a dark cell by the fathers of his Observance; and there, deprived of the consolation of celebrating Holy Mass, he had to endure for many long months very rigorous abstinence, humiliating disciplines, and the bitterest reproaches. For the same reason, and also because of the extraordinary ways by which God was leading her, St. Teresa the Elder had to support the heavy trials whereof we catch a glimpse in her autobiography. Her

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<sup>21</sup> *Vér. ép.*, c. xiii.

confessor, Balthazar Alvarez, also suffered serious annoyance on account of his supernatural prayer. We could cite numberless other examples. But we shall conclude with St. Alphonsus. During many years he was pitilessly persecuted, as a theologian by the rigorists, as the founder of the Redemptorists by the royalists, and finally by two of his own religious, as we have already stated. Baronius relates how Pope St. Leo IX permitted himself to be prejudiced against St. Peter Damian. "I mention this," adds the illustrious annalist, "to console the victims of venomous tongues, to recommend prudence to those who are over-credulous, and warn them of the danger of lending too easy an ear to calumnies, particularly against persons with a long and honourable life to their credit." <sup>22</sup>

Such persecutions are apparently due to the diversity of human minds and characters. "What concord hath Christ with Belial?" (II *Cor.* vi, 15). Sinners cannot endure the sight of virtue, let it be ever so modest and unobtrusive, because it condemns them, troubles them, demands their conversion. Good people, because they have not as yet sufficiently mastered their passions, which is the case with the majority, allow themselves to be blinded and misled, sooner or later, to the prejudice of peace and charity. Thus, Father Francis de Paul, the principal persecutor of St. Alphonsus, was far from being a bad religious. He had, on the contrary, a very edifying past, and would doubtless have been greatly astonished, if it had been foretold to him that he would one day endeavour, with a zeal worthy of a better cause, to ruin his illustrious and saintly founder by insinuating, venomous, and slanderous reports. He actually fell to this depth, nevertheless, because he did not sufficiently combat the passion of ambition. Perhaps until then he had not even suspected its presence in his heart. But the saints themselves, even the very greatest, can be the cause of suffering to each

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<sup>22</sup> Poulain, *Grâces d'Or.*, c. xxiv.

other, whether through misunderstanding, or because of their different conceptions of duty. For men will always differ in their views and dispositions.

But to obtain a thorough understanding of the mystery of these trials we must go to Our Lord, and endeavour to penetrate the designs of Providence. Jesus has warned us that His coming meant the sword and not peace, and that a man's enemies would be those of his own household. He was persecuted, and called Beelzebub. The disciple is not above his master. Consequently, His faithful followers should also be persecuted, and hated, and driven from city to city, and betrayed, and the time would come when those who slew them would think they were thus doing a service to God. The Apostle echoes the words of his Master : " All who would live piously in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution " (II *Tim.* iii, 12). But, concludes the Saviour, " blessed are those that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. When they shall revile you and persecute you and speak all that is evil against you untruly, for My sake, be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you " (*Matt.* v, 10-12). But what is the object Providence pursues by means of such purifying trials? It wills to mark all its works with the Sign of the Cross, to detach us from human esteem and affection, to exercise us in patience, in complete abandonment, in love for God alone, and to perfect the sanctity of Our Lord's most devoted friends.

Jesus humbled, despised, the Victim of iniquity, -but meek and humble of heart in the midst of all kinds of outrages, affectionate, self-sacrificing even to the shedding of His Blood despite injustice and perfidy : here is the Master Who shows us the way, the Model to Whom the Holy Spirit has the mission of conforming us. Providence employs the vicious and the virtuous as its instruments to reproduce in us Jesus outraged, condemned, shamefully ill-treated. But at the same time the Holy Spirit offers

us His grace, and works in us, to make us imitate Jesus meek and humble of heart, Jesus full of gentleness and heroic charity. To walk with resolute steps in the foot-prints of the persecuted Jesus is to enter on the ways of sanctity. To murmur and complain, and to follow Him reluctantly, is to drag oneself painfully along in uneasiness and mediocrity. Besides, "we should be convinced," says St. Alphonsus, "that in recompense for our patience in suffering all persecutions in the proper spirit, God will have special care of us—and He as Master can deliver us when He wills. But even should we have to live always here below under the cloud of dishonour, let us remember that there is another life where our patience shall be rewarded with a glory the more magnificent on that account." <sup>23</sup>

Let us, therefore, forget our human adversaries and all the wrongs we may seem to suffer from them. Let us banish from our hearts every feeling of bitterness and spite. With our eyes fixed on the persecuted Son of God, on Jesus our Model and the Well-Beloved of our souls, let us adore like Him all the decrees of His Father Who is our Father also. Let us lovingly embrace both the trials He sends us and their already existent and irreparable effects, endeavouring the while, in order to draw from them the greatest possible advantage, to enter into the dispositions of our sweet Jesus, and to act in every circumstance as He would do in our place. This will not prevent us—with regard to what is still future—from doing all in our power to avoid the danger or to deprecate its consequences, if that should be pleasing to God, as often as His glory, the good of souls, or other just causes may seem to require or permit it.

The Blessed Henry Suso lived a long time in this dolorous way. Let us attend to the instructions given him from heaven. He heard an interior voice saying to him: "Open the window of your cell and look and learn." He opened the window and looked out. He saw a dog running

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<sup>23</sup> *Vér. ép.*, c. xiii.

along the cloister with a piece of cloth in its mouth. The animal played with the cloth, threw it into the air, trailed it on the ground, rent it and tore it to shreds. He then heard the voice again saying : " So shall you be mangled and torn by the mouths of your brethren." Thereupon he thus reflected : " Since it must be so, I have only to resign myself. I must submit in silence to be treated like that piece of cloth." He went down to the cloister, took the cloth, and kept it many years as a most precious treasure. Whenever he felt tempted to impatience, the sight of his keepsake reminded him of what he should be, and helped him to maintain a heroic silence. Once, when he turned aside from those who persecuted him, he was punished interiorly, and he heard in his heart the words : " Remember that I, your Saviour, did not turn away My Face from those who spat on Me." He repented of his momentary weakness, and renewed his good resolutions. The interior voice said to him again : " It is God's will that, when you are outraged by words or actions, you should suffer all patiently. He wants you to die completely to yourself, and requires that every day before taking your repast you should approach your adversaries and do your best to appease their anger by the meekness and humility of your language and behaviour. . . . You must not believe them to be Judases in the true sense of the word, but only God's instruments in trying you for your own benefit." <sup>24</sup>

St. Alphonsus, when condemned by the Pope on unjust accusations, and actually expelled from the Congregation he had founded, permitted himself no complaint, no recrimination. He simply spoke these words of heroic submission : " For the past six months I have been repeating this prayer : Lord, whatsoever Thou willest, that I will also." And, with a heart broken yet fully resigned, he submitted to remain an exile until his death, because such was the will of God. Far

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<sup>24</sup> *L'Exempl.*, cc. xxii, xxxi, xl.

from harbouring ill-feeling against his persecutor, he wrote to him as follows: "I have learned with joy that the Pope showers his favours upon you. Please let me always know whenever any good fortune befalls you, so that I may return thanks to God for it. I pray Him to increase His holy love in you, to multiply your houses, and to bless both yourself and your missions." In this trial, as in all other difficult circumstances, he began by asking the prayers of his Congregation, and recommending each religious to renew his fervour, so that they might have the protection of God. Then he took every precaution that prudence prescribed, yet holding himself always in readiness to conform his will to the divine good-pleasure, whatever it might be.<sup>25</sup>

At the height of his persecutions, St. John of the Cross welcomed reproaches with joy, because he believed himself deserving of still worse treatment. It seemed to him that he could never suffer injuries enough. He longed for the hour when he was to receive the bloody discipline, impatient to endure the pain and disgrace of it for the love of God. He considered himself so full of defects, guilty of so many sins, that he never dreamed of resenting affronts and outrages, or of regarding them as cruel or unjust. Although his interior pains at this time were still more severe, he found consolation in his intimate communings with God and in the composition of his admirable canticle, which he explained later on.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Berthe, *Saint Alphonse*, I, vi, c. xi.

<sup>26</sup> *Am. de Dieu.*, I, viii, c. iv.

## CHAPTER VI

### ON ABANDONMENT IN ESSENTIAL SPIRITUAL GOODS

**W**E shall occupy ourselves in this chapter with what appertains to the essence of the spiritual life : first, its essential end, which is the life of glory ; second, its essence here below, which is the life of grace ; third, its essential exercise in this world, that is, the practice of the virtues and the avoidance of sin ; fourth, its essential means, which are the observance of the precepts and of our particular obligations, such as vows, rules, etc. All these are necessary for adults, religious and seculars alike, whatever be the rank or condition in which it has pleased God to place them, and by whatsoever paths He conducts them to their end. They constitute the proper object of His signified will. They are, consequently, the province of obedience, not that of holy abandonment. Nevertheless, even here abandonment can find occasions for its exercise.

#### ARTICLE I.—THE LIFE OF GLORY

“ God has declared in so many ways and by so many means that He wills the salvation of all, that nobody can be ignorant of the fact. And though all shall not in fact be saved, this will does not cease thereby to be a true will of God Who acts in us according to the requirements of His own Nature and ours.” He gives us His grace in abundance, but leaves us the liberty without which we could not merit. “ We must will our salvation as God wills it ; consequently, we must will and embrace with an absolute resolution the graces He imparts. For it is necessary that our wills be conformed to His.”<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, viii, c. iv.



are the words of St. Francis de Sales, and we love to cite them in order to vindicate his doctrine from the misrepresentation of the Quietists. Bossuet sets out from the passage just quoted to establish with a thousand proofs the fact that, salvation being included in the primary object of God's signified will, the pious Bishop of Geneva could not have brought it under abandonment, and that "if the Saint seems to extend holy indifference to all things," he has in mind only what depends on the divine good-pleasure alone. Moreover, it would be an impiety against God and an act of supreme cruelty against ourselves to make ourselves indifferent with respect to salvation or damnation.

Yet this monstrous indifference was very dear to the Quietists. They condemned the desire for heaven and scorned the virtue of hope, some because desire means an act; others because perfection, in their view, demands that we should be influenced by love alone, which excludes fear, hope, and all regard for one's own interests. Herein we find almost as many errors as words. In order to leave God a free hand and to render ourselves docile to His inspirations, it is indeed necessary to suppress all that is defective in our activity, but not the activity itself. We require *that* for correspondence with grace: God helps him who helps himself. The motive of pure love is undoubtedly the most perfect; but all the other supernatural motives are good, too, and God Himself is pleased to excite them in souls. Charity animates the other virtues, it rules and ennobles them; but it does not suppress them. It is rather like a queen who never shows herself without the pomp of her full cortege. Charity occupies the first place, hope the second. The two are necessary, and so far from being mutually antagonistic, they live together in perfect harmony. Besides, is it not the very nature of love to tend to union? And the more ardent the love, the stronger becomes the yearning to be united with the Beloved. We think of Him constantly, we desire His presence, His friendship, His intimacy; we can no longer

do without Him. And if a fervent soul willingly consents to postpone her entrance into heaven, it is just from the desire to please God by embracing His holy will, and to be able to see and possess Him more perfectly throughout eternity. After all, does not salvation mean pure love, always actual, unchanging and perfect? Whereas damnation implies the final and total extinction of love.<sup>2</sup>

It is true, Moses asked to have his name blotted out of the book of life unless God pardoned His people, and St. Paul desired to be anathema for his brethren. St. Francis de Sales assures us that a soul heroically indifferent "would prefer hell with the will of God to paradise without the will of God. And if, supposing such a thing were possible, she knew that her damnation would be more pleasing to God than her salvation, she would freely renounce heaven and take her place amongst the damned."<sup>3</sup> In these impossible suppositions, the saints reveal the greatness, the ardour, the transports of their charity. But they are certainly very far removed from a criminal indifference with regard to the final possession or loss of God, the love or hatred of Him for all eternity. They simply mean to say that they would cheerfully endure, if God's will so required, all the pains of this world, and even all the torments of hell, sin excluded. So great is their love of God! So ardent their desire to please Him by accomplishing His will in all things, and to glorify Him by the conversion of souls! St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus faithfully echoes the sentiments of those elder saints when, "not knowing how to tell Jesus how much she loved Him, how much she desired that He should be *everywhere* loved and served, she declared herself willing to be plunged into the abyss of hell, so that even there He might have someone to love Him eternally. Of course, this could not glorify Him, since He desires only our happiness. But when we love much we feel constrained to utter such follies!"<sup>4</sup> Protestations

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, *États d'Or.*, ii, viii et ix.

<sup>3</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, i, ix, c. iv; *Eniret.*, ii.

<sup>4</sup> *Histoire*, c. v.

of this kind are quite sincere on the lips of Moses, St. Paul, and the other saints. But souls less perfect run the risk of fostering a presumptuous illusion and gratifying self-love when they indulge in them.

To sum up, we must positively will all that God commands. And since He has nothing more at heart than our salvation, we must will that absolutely and above all. The only place for abandonment in this matter is the question of time, whether sooner or later, as we showed when treating of life and death, and the degree of grace and glory, as we shall now proceed to explain.

## ARTICLE II.—THE LIFE OF GRACE

The life of grace is the germ that develops into the life of glory. The former is spent in the combats of probation, the latter triumphs in happiness achieved. But, in essence, they are one and the same life, supernatural and divine, which begins here below and is consummated in heaven. Moreover, the life of grace is the indispensable condition of the life of glory, and determines the degree in which this shall be enjoyed. Consequently, we ought to desire the one as much as the other. God wills that we should pursue them both as the supreme end of our existence. He occupies Himself exclusively in helping us to acquire them; and the demon's one desire is to make us lose them. Souls with a full realisation of their destiny have no other object, amid the labours and vicissitudes of earthly existence, than to preserve the life of grace, so precious and so disputed, and to bring it to its highest development. Hence, with regard to the actual possession of this life, there can be no question of holy abandonment, for it is the clearly signified will of God that we "should have life and have it more abundantly" (*John* x, 10).

But abandonment may be practised in what concerns the *degree* of grace, and consequently the

degree of the virtues and the degree of eternal glory. According to the teaching of the Council of Trent, "we receive grace in the measure in which the Holy Ghost imparts it to us and in proportion to our dispositions and co-operation."<sup>5</sup> Grace, the supernatural virtues, and glory depend, therefore, at the same time on God Who communicates His gifts as He pleases, and on man in so far as he disposes himself and corresponds.

Since in all this our individual generosity is a determining factor, we must pray, we must pray more, we must pray better, we must co-operate with the divine action courageously and perseveringly, and we must spare no effort to reach the degree of virtue and glory which Providence has destined for us. How is it that we have not mounted higher in sanctity? What is the reason that we merely vegetate, so to speak, instead of possessing a superabundance of spiritual life? Grace is imparted plentifully to generous souls; we are deluged with it in the cloister. But it would be given in still greater measure, and would produce far more fruit, if we knew better how to obtain it by prayer and did not oppose it by our infidelities. No, it is not that grace has been wanting to us, but we have been wanting to grace. Let us never throw the blame on God, in order to excuse our own negligence. There is only too much of the truth in the following reflection of St. Francis de Sales: "He comes to us, Jesus, the Well-Beloved of our souls, and He finds our hearts full of worldly desires, affections, and petty volitions. He is disappointed, because He wished to find them empty, so that He could enter and make Himself their Master and Governor. We have indeed renounced mortal sin and all attachments to evil. But the nooks and corners of our hearts are filled with a thousand things that tie His hands and prevent Him from giving us the graces He designed to bestow. Let us, therefore, do all that lies

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<sup>5</sup> *Sess. VI de Justif., c. vii.*

within our power, and then abandon ourselves to Divine Providence.”<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, God remains supreme Master of His gifts. He refuses none the graces necessary for the attainment of the end He has been pleased to appoint for us. But to some He gives more, to others less. And very often He opens His hand to give with prodigality and profusion, when He wills and as He wills. It is thus Our Lord, “with a heart truly filial, preventing His Mother with the blessings of His sweetness, preserved her from every taint of sin,” and so sanctified her that she became “His peerless Dove, His Perfect One beyond all comparison.” It is quite certain in the case of St. John Baptist, and very probable in the case of Jeremias and St. Joseph, that the Holy Spirit took hold of them in the womb of their mothers and established them for ever in the possession of His love. The Apostles, chosen to be the pillars of the Church, were confirmed in grace on the day of Pentecost. In the whole immense multitude of the saints perhaps there are no two exactly equal, for the liturgy makes us sing, on the feast of each Confessor Pontiff: “His like has not been found.” We find the same diversity in the ranks of the faithful. “And who does not see that amongst Christians the means of salvation are more plentiful and powerful than amongst pagans, and that some Catholic districts and towns obtain better pastors than others?”<sup>7</sup> Yes, and are otherwise, too, more favourably circumstanced. Grace is more abundant in the cloister than in the world; often more abundant in one monastery than in another.

“But we must be careful never to inquire wherefore Supreme Wisdom has given a particular grace to one rather than to another, or why He is more prodigal of His gifts in one place than in another. No, Theotime, you must never indulge in such curiosity. For since all men are given in sufficient, even in abundant measure, that

<sup>6</sup> *Entret.*, xviii.

<sup>7</sup> *Id. Am de Dieu*, I, II, cc. vi et vii.

which they require to work out their salvation, what cause for complaint can anyone have, if it pleases God to bestow His graces more liberally on some than on others? . . . It is therefore an impertinence to ask the reason why St. Paul had not the grace of St. Peter, or St. Peter the grace of St. Paul; why St. Anthony was not St. Athanasius, or St. Athanasius St. Jerome. The Church is a garden diversified with an infinitude of beautiful flowers. Consequently, we must find there flowers of every size, of every colour, of every odour; in short, of every degree of perfection. Each of them has its own worth, its own grace, its own beauty; and in the tout-ensemble of their variety they form a very agreeable picture of perfection and loveliness. Furthermore, we must never expect to discover a better reason for God's will than the will of God, which is supremely reasonable, yea, the reason of all reasons, the rule of all goodness, the law of all equity." <sup>s</sup>

Consequently, the soul that practises abandonment, whilst sparing no efforts in her zeal to advance, leaves it to God to determine what degree of sanctity she shall attain in this world, the extraordinary graces wherewith such sanctity may be accompanied here below, and the glory that shall crown her in heaven. If Our Lord should be pleased to raise some of her associates in a short time to the summit of perfection, to lavish upon them singular favours, wonderful lights, extraordinary sentiments of devotion: she feels no jealousy thereat. On the contrary, she rejoices, in view of the glory of God and the profit to souls. And instead of admitting into her heart an unholy sadness or unreasonable desires, she keeps herself resolutely in holy abandonment. The degree of glory to which she aspires is just that which God has destined for her. Yet she does all that depends upon her with courage and perseverance, so as not to fall short of the corresponding degree of sanctity which is the object of all her desires.

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<sup>s</sup> *Id. Am de Dieu*, I, II, c. vii.

## ARTICLE III.—THE PRACTICE OF THE VIRTUES

God deifies the substance of our souls by sanctifying grace, and our faculties by the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, for no other reason than to make us produce supernatural acts of virtue: just as we plant fruit-trees for the sake of the fruit they shall yield. And if Our Lord has given us His precepts and His example, if He threatens and promises, if He overwhelms us with His graces, interior and exterior: it is solely because He wants us to practise virtue, to avoid sin, and so to obtain eternal life. For, in the case of adults, the practice of virtue is the one way to salvation and perfection. It is the proximate end of the spiritual life, and its essential exercise, sometimes obligatory, sometimes free. It is the daily task which God appoints for our activity. And it will be the work of our whole lives, because the virtues are many, complex, and indefinitely perfectible.

“ Since the practice of the virtues appertains to the signified will,” says Bossuet, “ that is, to the express commandment of God, there is no room here for the exercise of abandonment or indifference. To abandon oneself with regard to the virtues or to remain indifferent to them would be impiety.”<sup>9</sup> Similar is the language of St. Francis de Sales: “ God has commanded us to do all we can for the acquisition of the virtues. Let us, therefore, omit nothing that can contribute to our success in this holy enterprise.”<sup>10</sup> He says elsewhere that we may desire and pray for the virtues, that we are even bound to do so, and to do so absolutely and without condition.<sup>11</sup>

Inasmuch as the practice of the virtues belongs to the signified will of God, we have only to apply ourselves to that work according to the principles of Christian asceticism, with the assistance of grace, certainly, but by

<sup>9</sup> *États d'Or.*, i, viii, 14.

<sup>10</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. vii.

<sup>11</sup> *Entret.*, vi et xxi.

our own free determination : we must not wait until God, by the dispositions of His Providence, puts us under the necessity of doing so and manifests His will anew. We already know what He requires of us, and that is enough. It is for us to create occasions for the exercise of the virtues, and to avail of those provided by our holy rules and by the sequence of events. Even without exterior occasions, we can multiply interior acts. So far as concerns the practice of virtue itself, it does not belong to the object of abandonment. But in many things relating thereto, as the degree, the manner, and particular means, abandonment may be lawfully exercised.

I.—With regard to the degree of virtue : “ This depends,” writes Le Gaudier, “ on ourselves and on grace at the same time. We have therefore the power, and even the duty, to direct all our efforts towards the constant development of virtue in our souls, and nevertheless to be satisfied with the measure thereof which Providence is pleased to impart to us. Hence, if we observe our progress relaxing or coming to a stand-still, if we find ourselves omitting acts of this or that virtue or even lapsing into positive faults, we should blame ourselves for being wanting to grace and not corresponding with the designs of God. But since He has judged well to permit the faults or to put this limit to our progress, in order to procure His own glory and for our humiliation, and also perhaps to punish our negligence, it is absolutely necessary for us to conform our wills to His.”<sup>12</sup> Let us acknowledge, however, with this pious author, that “ if we do not mount higher in perfection the fault is generally our own.” Grace abounds in every faithful soul, but our ideals are not lofty enough, and we lack courage and perseverance.

II.—There are defective ways of practising virtue. A secret pride, the hankering after enjoyment, the fear of suffering, can insinuate themselves into our pursuit of

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<sup>12</sup> *De perf. vitæ spir.*, P. III, Sec. II, c. ix.



perfection. It belongs to Christian mortification to remedy these defects, but Providence will provide the means in abundance. Let us cite some examples. There is first of all the egoistic manner, that is to say, the seeking of our own satisfaction in divine consolations, in our exercises of devotion, and even in our progress in the virtues. God, therefore, will conduct us in such a way as to disengage us little by little from these attachments, in order that with more purity and simplicity we may seek only the divine good-pleasure, and henceforth cultivate the virtues "not because they are agreeable, useful, honourable, and qualified to flatter our self-love, but because they are pleasing to God, conducive to His honour, and destined for His glory." This is the reason why the holiest souls are afflicted with aridities, impeded by a thousand repugnances and difficulties, crushed, annihilated by the sense of their helplessness and utter misery. God wills to cure them thus of pride and subtle sensualism, so that they may learn to serve Him only, for His own sake and in the pure spirit of faith. There is also the restless and eager manner. Many souls, animated with the desire to perfect themselves by the acquisition of the virtues, would wish to obtain them all by a single effort—as if it were sufficient to aspire after perfection in order at once to attain it. God certainly intends that we should do all that depends upon ourselves, by faithfully practising each virtue according to our condition and vocation. He wills in this way to accustom us to tend towards perfection gradually, in peace, in tranquillity of heart. As to arriving at our goal a little sooner or a little later, He requires us to leave that to Providence. And He leads us forward in such a manner as to moderate the impatience of our desires and maintain us in humility.

III.—The particular means of practising virtue also leave room for abandonment. God claims the right to interfere in His own time and in the manner most pleasing to Him in order to remove obstacles, to provide opportunities, to facilitate for us the work of our sanctification.

He does this through every event of His good-pleasure, employing all men in the interests of His glory, "but some more in action than in suffering, others in martyrdom, persecutions, voluntary mortifications, sickness, etc. Our part is to make ourselves indifferent to all these things and simply to wait in peace upon the divine good-pleasure; then, as soon as it has been clearly manifested, to embrace it with ardour."<sup>13</sup> Why should we not? Is it not supremely wise, paternal, and salutary? Besides, nobody has the right to ask God why He has placed us here rather than there, why He conducts us by such a way rather than by another. For a greater reason, we should not demand of Him some of those special interventions where His action, singularly powerful, illumines, inflames, transforms souls, or at least causes them to make remarkable progress in a short time and with little effort. St. Teresa the Elder, in many passages of her autobiography, instances cases of this kind. She tells us particularly how the first rapture with which God favoured her detached her all at once from certain friendships, quite innocent in themselves, but which preoccupied her overmuch; and how from that time she was actually incapable of forming any friendship of which He was not the bond.<sup>14</sup> But such rapid progress, such sudden illuminations, such astonishing transformations must always be rare exceptions to the general rule. Having endowed us with intelligence and free-will, and put His grace at our disposal, God usually "leaves us in the hand of our own counsel" (*Eccli.* xv, 14). It is therefore on our own spiritual activity, assisted by grace, that we must rely for the practice of the virtues. He would be very rash, very foolish, who, counting on the extraordinary interventions of God, would neglect all personal initiative and remain in the slumber of spiritual sloth.

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<sup>13</sup> Le Gaudier, *De per. vitæ spir.*, P. III, S. II, c. IX.

<sup>14</sup> *Vie*, xvii, xxi, xxv.

## ARTICLE IV.—THE AVOIDANCE OF SIN

“ The life of man upon earth is a warfare ” (*Job. vii, 1*). Day and night, within and without, the enemies of our salvation lie in wait to rob us of our treasure of virtues, even of the life of grace, and by consequence of the life of glory, too. We have to watch, pray, struggle ceaselessly, keep repelling the assaults of the demon, defeating his strategies, holding down our vicious inclinations and our unruly passions which are in league with him. And should he succeed in penetrating our lines of defence by sin, we must drive him out again by prompt repentance, repair the ill-consequences of our fault, provide against a renewed offensive on the part of the enemy, and prepare for the final victory by vigilance and a courage always on the alert. But as we are weakness itself, we should never forget to summon to our aid the omnipotence of God. The struggle is one of absolute necessity, and must end only with our earthly life. The hour we cease to combat, that hour sin will force its way into our hearts, as a hostile army precipitates itself upon a country which has ceased to put up a successful resistance. Moreover, how much time is needed to detach ourselves from every created object, and to establish ourselves in purity of heart and peace of soul ! And when once we have acquired these advantages, what further efforts will be necessary to maintain them !

“ Our Lord,” says St. Francis de Sales, “ never ceases to exhort, to promise, to threaten, to forbid, to command and to inspire us in the interior of our souls, in order to turn our wills away from sin ; and He leaves nothing undone for this end short of depriving us of our liberty.” <sup>15</sup> The divine will has been manifested to us times beyond number, and in different ways. With a perfectly clear knowledge of what it requires from us in a matter of capital importance, indifference on our part would be criminal. We must consequently make up our minds to

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<sup>15</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, viii, c. ix.

carry on the combat without truce or quarter, and to expect no other assistance than the grace promised to prayer and fidelity.

No doubt, God could come to our aid by one of those particularly powerful interventions which overmaster a soul and transform her with astonishing rapidity. Thus Mary Magdalen was changed almost instantaneously from a scandalous sinner to a saint of marvellous purity. St. Peter, after his triple denial, met the gaze of Jesus, and immediately his tears began to flow and continued to flow until his last breath. The Good Thief, hitherto a malefactor and a blasphemer, was thoroughly converted in his last moments, and received from the mouth of his Saviour the consoling assurance of his salvation. The Apostles, previously timid and full of defects, were confirmed in grace and imbued with invincible courage on Pentecost Day. Saul, on the way to Damascus, was thrown to the earth a fanatical persecutor and rose an ardent apostle. God could likewise, without the least difficulty or delay, cause us to pass from sin or tepidity to the holiest dispositions. Such marvellous transformations are in His power, but, as St. Francis de Sales remarks, "they are as extraordinary in the order of grace as are the resuscitations of the dead in the order of nature. Hence we should never look for them."<sup>16</sup> In the same way, God with one word could calm the souls He sees in trouble or embarrassment, and suddenly establish them in whatever state He pleases. Sometimes He does this, but it is not His usual procedure. He prefers that, as a rule, "the purification and cure of soul and body alike should be effected little by little, step by step, with expenditure of time and effort."<sup>17</sup>

God has judged it more glorious for us and for Himself not to save us without our co-operation; yet He provides us with such assistance that if we are lost, our loss shall be imputable solely to ourselves. If He preserved us,

<sup>16</sup> *Vie dévote*, 1<sup>re</sup> P., c. v.

<sup>17</sup> *Id. loc. cit*

converted us, transformed us, with scarcely any effort on our part, where would be our merit? But by leaving us more to our own free determination He obliges us to greater efforts. And along with the merit and the honour of voluntary co-operation with Him, He furnishes us with the means of incessant progress by vigilance, prayer, combat, penance, humility, and Christian mortification. Having created us free, He governs us with respect for our freedom. His wisdom deemed it better to draw good out of evil than to prevent all evil at the cost of human liberty. He wills, therefore, that we should have to fight against our evil inclinations, our irregular passions, as well as against our external enemies. He has marked out our duty for us, He offers us His grace, He will reward us according to our works : but He permits us to take our own course. We must, then, arm ourselves with courage and be resigned to the struggle, adoring Divine Providence in this holy permission, " wherein He displays His wisdom in governing free creatures, His liberality in rewarding the good, His patience in bearing with the wicked, His power in converting sinners or at least bringing them to order by His justice, finally His glory, which He finds in all things and which is the one sole object of His seeking." <sup>18</sup> But at the same time, let us obey His signified will whereby He commands us to hate sin, to avoid it by vigilance, prayer, and struggle, or to repair it by penance.

#### ARTICLE V.—THE OBSERVANCE OF THE PRECEPTS, OUR VOWS, RULES, ETC.

After explaining in the articles preceding that which concerns eternal glory, the life of grace, the practice of the virtues, and the avoidance of sin, we shall group here together, in this final article, all the other objects

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<sup>18</sup> Le Gaudier, *ibid.*, P. III, S. II, c. xiii.

that appertain to the signified will, such as the precepts of God and the Church, the evangelical counsels, the duties of our particular state, and, consequently, for us religious, our vows, our rules, the orders of our superiors; finally, the inspirations of grace, and the examples of Our Lord and the saints. By the fact that all these belong to God's signified will, they constitute the domain proper to obedience, not that of holy abandonment. Besides, they are the means assigned us for the avoidance of sin, the cultivation of the virtues, the life of grace, and the acquisition of glory. And as God wills the end, He wills likewise the means, aye, and values them greatly. Some of them He imposes on us by way of precept, or, if He leaves them free, they have become obligatory in consequence of our religious profession. Others are optional; but it is God Who proposes them, Who urges and draws us to adopt them by His promises and the inspirations of His grace. Thus, for example, He invites us, the due conditions being supposed, to do something of our own good will beyond the necessary measure of prayer and sacrifice demanded by our rules; He draws us to multiply interior acts of the virtues, to imitate the saints more perfectly, and above all the Divine Model of the saints, our sweet and well-beloved Saviour, Jesus.

Consequently, for the accomplishment of these various duties, at least in so far as they are really duties, we have no need to wait until the sequence of events manifests to us the divine will, or until a special motion of the Holy Spirit impels us to obedience. God's will is already perfectly known to us, and His grace is at our disposal. We have only to act by the free determination of our own wills, keeping our eyes constantly fixed upon the divine precepts, our monastic rules, and the other indications of the signified will, in order thereby to regulate each step of our progress.

However, we should attach ourselves to all these observances only for so long as they continue to be the will of God in our regard. Should He cease to will them,

we must detach ourselves therefrom in order to embrace cheerfully what He now ordains. For certain of His precepts are not so immutable that they cannot be modified by circumstances. The same applies to the commandments of the Church; for instance, assistance at Mass, and the obligatory fasts and abstinence in the case of illness, etc. For a greater reason, God can modify some of our monastic obligations; by altering the state of our health, for example, or in other ways. He can also, according to His good-pleasure, leave us or take from us the facility for such or such an optional practice. It is impossible for any individual to observe all the evangelical counsels, or to imitate all the external actions of Our Lord and the saints. A choice has to be made. Ordinarily, God leaves that to our own initiative. Sometimes, however, He chooses for us Himself, disposing of us by His will of good-pleasure. In these matters, consequently, there is ample room for abandonment.

It is particularly by the vocation He gives us, or by the condition in which He places us, that God assigns to each his place in the spiritual conflict, his arms, and the manner of his service. People in the world are not obliged to the observances of the cloister. The strictly contemplative life is not consistent with the external apostolate. Nor does the active life permit the constant occupations of Mary. Poverty, whether voluntary or otherwise, renders almsgiving impossible, etc. Even in the cloister we have no lack of opportunities for the practice of abandonment. For instance, God, through the superior, entrusts offices to some and leaves others without special employment; He bestows health as He pleases, and with health the facility for the observance of the whole rule; and when it seems good to Him He deprives us of our strength and reduces us to a condition of complete or partial impotence.

But if we cannot, each of us, imitate all the examples of Our Lord and the saints, or observe all the evangelical counsels, we should nevertheless esteem them at their proper value; we should not despise practices which have

conducted great souls to the summit of perfection, although we should content ourselves with following those counsels and observances which harmonise with our condition or vocation. Let us fulfil with particular zeal the obligations common to all Christians, and the duties proper to our holy state. Let us attach ourselves wholeheartedly to these means of sanctification, as being willed for us by God. If necessary, let us reanimate our courage and our spirit of faith, that we may not grow slack in regular observance. But if the events brought about by Providence indicate that God no longer wills us to practise such or such means, and if this should be the judgment of those charged with our direction, we must detach ourselves therefrom in order to embrace what God wills for us now, and compensate for the loss of the other observance by our filial abandonment to the divine good-pleasure.



## CHAPTER VII

### ON ABANDONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL VARIETIES OF THE COMMON WAY

#### ON THE PRIVATION OF CERTAIN SPIRITUAL HELPS

**T**HE expression "spiritual varieties" we have borrowed from St. Francis de Sales, and we employ it to signify everything which, although not belonging to the essence of the supernatural life, is attached thereto as an accident to a substance.

In our last chapter we went through the essential constituents of the spiritual life : its essential end, its essence and essential exercise in this world, and its essential means. Whatever may be the situation in which God has put us, whatever the path by which He leads us, we have always the obligation to tend to eternal glory, to live the life of grace, and therefore to avoid sin and to practise the virtues after the example of our Divine Model, and by the means appointed for us by the signified will ; or at least by such of these means as are obligatory for each of us. Here we have the invariable element of the spiritual life which must be found in every one of the faithful, of no matter what age or condition. It is this that establishes the family likeness amongst all God's children.

But on this common ground of essential sanctity, we find depicted particular traits and characteristics which widely vary from one soul to another, and even in the same soul at different times. Thus, there are innocents and penitents, religious and seculars, contemplatives and persons engaged in the active ministry. God, the All-Beautiful, loves variety in unity. He therefore multiplies almost to infinity different vocations. Under one and the same monastic rule, His grace gives some a particular

leaning towards penance, others towards contemplation, still others towards obedience, others again towards charity. By His will of good-pleasure He disposes events in such a way as to lead us along according to His desires, whether in peace or in conflict, in aridities or in consolations, by the common or by the mystical ways. In its essentials, the spiritual life is the same for all souls. But the accidental traits are sufficiently diversified to impress upon each soul her own individual physiognomy.

It remains now to treat of these varieties, but only in so far as they proceed from the divine good-pleasure, and hence give occasion for the practice of abandonment. We shall commence with such as may be found in every spiritual way, common or mystical. Afterwards, the varieties proper to mystical states shall occupy our special attention.

In the preceding chapter we pointed out that the divine good-pleasure may withdraw from us, for a time or for good, certain means of sanctification which otherwise would be very commendable, or even obligatory. These may be persons, natural resources, observances, exercises of piety, or even the Sacraments.

I.—First, as regards persons. These may be directors or superiors or parents or friends, whose help was in the past of the utmost importance to our spiritual life, but whom God has deprived us of by death or separation. Assuredly, it is not permitted us to put our trust in any man as if he were the primary cause of our sanctification. But we are allowed to confide in a fellow-mortal, as in a secondary agent, and the chosen instrument of Providence in this holy enterprise. And the more this man is full of the Spirit of God and capable of benefiting our souls, the more is it wise, lawful, and to a certain extent even necessary, to depend on him. All the supports which God gives us : supports of affection, of edification, of direction, we should accept with gratitude ; yet we should be as ready to bless Him when He withdraws as when He bestows them. Nevertheless, it is permissible to believe that, even

if we should shed some tears at such a privation, the love of God, jealous as it is, will not reproach us therefor.

It may seem to you that you simply cannot carry on if deprived of this support. An illusion! So long as he has been useful and in a sense indispensable to you, this wise director, this holy superior, this spiritual friend has been left to you. But has God ceased to love you? Is He not your Father? Could such a Father forget your most sacred interests? Rest assured, then, He has not abandoned you. It is true, the guide whose loss you lament has conducted you happily so far. But is he equally capable of leading you in what remains of the way to be traversed? Our Lord could say to His Apostles, doubtless because they loved Him with a too natural affection: "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go I will send Him to you" (*John xvi, 7*). Now, is this friend, this director more necessary to you than Our Lord was to His Apostles? But perhaps you will say: "This privation is a punishment for my infidelities." Granted. But the chastisements of a true father become for docile children salutary remedies. Do you wish to disarm God, to touch His heart, to oblige Him to shower an abundance of new graces upon you? Accept His chastisement and implore His aid. And in recompense for your trustful abandonment to His good-pleasure, He will either provide the director of whom you still have need, or He will Himself undertake your direction.

Father Alvarez was one day occupied in brooding over the harm done him by the loss of his director, when he heard in his heart a voice saying: "He does an injury to God whosoever believes he has need of human support whereof he has been deprived through no fault of his. He Who has hitherto directed you through a man like yourself, wills now to have you under His own immediate direction. What reason have you, then, to complain? Rather should you feel thankful for what is in truth a

singular favour and the prelude to many more.”<sup>1</sup> To which St. Alphonsus adds: “Our sanctification is not the work of our spiritual fathers, but the work of God. When the Lord gives them to us, He wills that we should profit by their ministry for the direction of our conscience. But when He removes them from us, He wills that, far from being discontented, we should rather redouble our confidence in His goodness, and that we should address Him in words such as these: ‘Lord, Thou hast given me this support and behold Thou hast taken him from me again. May Thy will be always done! But now, I implore Thee, come to my assistance, and teach me what I must do in order to serve Thee faithfully.’ ”<sup>2</sup> It would, however, be a mistake to think that this confidence in God prevents us from doing our best resignedly to find another competent director. God helps him who helps himself.

Let us quote the remarks of Saint-Jure *à propos* of this point: “In the loss of persons who are useful for our spiritual progress we often commit two serious faults, by resenting their removal, and by not showing ourselves sufficiently submissive to the designs of God with regard to such persons. This is an evident sign that we were unduly attached to them, and that we depended more on the instrument than on the principal cause. The soul that sincerely loves God and is zealous for her own perfection ought to say: ‘Whether directors live or die, whether they remain or depart, let all be done which Thou willest, O Lord, and as Thou willest. It is Thou Who didst send me this guide; it is Thou Who hast willed to remove him: what Thou willest I will, too. Thy amiable and loving will is far dearer to me than his presence. Thou hast instructed me through him so long as it pleased Thee to let him remain, and for that I thank Thee. Now that Thou hast withdrawn him, Thou wilt instruct me through others whom Thy paternal goodness will provide when

<sup>1</sup> Du Pont, *op. cit.*, xv.

<sup>2</sup> *Conf.*, 5, 4.

necessary, as I pray Thee to do. Or, what will be still better, Thou wilt instruct me immediately by Thyself.' ”<sup>3</sup>

This trial becomes more afflicting when those whom God has given us as a support cease to sustain us, turn against us, and threaten to frustrate our most cherished designs. This is what happened St. Alphonsus de' Liguori when he proposed to found his Congregation. It was destined to render inestimable services to the Church. And nevertheless, his former associates, as soon as they saw themselves in danger of losing him, gave free vent to their disapproval, their sarcasm, their bitter irony against the traitor, the deserter, the ingrate who meant to abandon them. They even tried to expel him from the Propaganda. Public opinion was aroused against him. His best friends turned their backs upon him. His directors, although approving of his project, refused to have anything more to do with him. He sustained a terrible assault from the tender affection of his father. His first disciples, unwilling to adopt his views, created a schism, and left him almost alone. In short, with the exception of his bishop and his new director, all those who should have been his staunchest helpers forsook him, and nearly all became his opponents. Amidst this storm of criticism and abuse, these discussions and desertions, Alphonsus recommended himself to the prayers of some holy friends, and to make sure of the divine will conferred with wise counsellors, and sought enlightenment from God by constant prayer and cruel mortifications. With a broken heart, he threw himself on his knees before the crucifix and cried as did the agonising Jesus: “My God, may Thy will be done!” Convinced that the Lord, although having no need of either him or his work, yet willed that he should go on with it, he resolved to persevere in his project, even if he had to labour alone; and he declared that God had permitted the dissensions in his Congregation only with a view to the greater good of souls. And in fact the events following the schism

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<sup>3</sup> Saint-Jure, *op. cit.*, I, iii, c. viii.

justified his assertion. For they showed that the divisions were permitted by Providence in order to purify by tribulation not only Alphonsus himself but also many other devout persons, and to make them all more zealous in the works of grace. "All those broken reeds became, under the hand of God, trees laden with excellent fruit."<sup>4</sup> The Blessed Marie-Madeleine Postel had to endure the same trial in somewhat similar circumstances.

II.—God is Master of the resources we make use of in well-doing, and can deprive us of them according to His good-pleasure. Hence He may withdraw from us our material possessions, our health, our leisure, our talents, or our knowledge. He may crush us, if it pleases Him, yea, annihilate us, so to speak, either for a time or for ever. When speaking of abandonment in temporal goods and evils, we discussed all these points. Here we shall mention them only in so far as they can be made the means of spiritual profit. And to avoid repetition, let us merely say that in our reduced circumstances God no longer expects from us the good works of our previous prosperity, in so far as He has deprived us of the means thereof. What He demands from us now is patience and resignation. He even desires that we should practise perfect abandonment. And through this holy indifference, this loving submission, we can give Him more glory and acquire more merit for ourselves in the time of our poverty than in the days of our abundance. With St. Francis de Sales, we shall present as an example of such abandonment the holy man, Job. This illustrious servant of God did not allow himself to be vanquished by any affliction. In his prosperity he scattered his bounties with ungrudging hands; and as he says himself, he was a foot to the lame, an eye to the blind, the feeder of the famishing and the refuge of all in affliction. But see him now, reduced to the very extreme of poverty, deprived of all his children and of his whole fortune. He does not complain that God has wounded him in his

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<sup>4</sup> Berthe, *op. cit.*, I, i, c. xi et I, ii, c. ii.

tenderest affections, or that He has taken from him the means of continuing his good works that were so laudable and so necessary. He simply resigns himself in perfect abandonment to the divine good-pleasure. And by this one act of patience and submission he exercised more virtue and made himself more agreeable to God than by all the countless charities of the time of his prosperity. "For this one act required a stronger and more generous love than all the rest put together," says the pious Bishop of Geneva. "We also," he continues, "should allow ourselves to be deprived by the Sovereign Master of the means of accomplishing our purposes, be they never so good and holy, whenever it pleases Him to take them from us, without complaining and lamenting as if a grievous wrong had been done us."<sup>5</sup> Patience and abandonment will fully compensate for the good we are no longer in a position to perform. This holy indifference with regard to health, talents, and the goods of fortune, this loving union of our wills with the will of God—what else is it but the death of self-love and the perfection of the spiritual life?

III.—Certain regular observances, certain individual practices can become impossible to us, for a longer or shorter time, through sickness, obedience, and other similar causes. Again, there may be devotional exercises which have an attraction for us, but which we have never had the opportunity to take up. Hence may arise trouble and regrets. But we have really no occasion for such feelings. As already remarked, no one person could possibly imitate all the practices of virtue of which Our Lord and the saints have given us the example. We must content ourselves with those which are for us in the order of Divine Providence. And assuredly we have no cause to complain in this respect, seeing that we have in our vocation, as contemplative religious, sufficiently ample scope for the practise of all the virtues. If we desire to fulfil with persevering fidelity both the duties common to all Christians and those proper to our state, all and sundry

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<sup>5</sup> *Entret.*, vii.

of our daily obligations, our zeal will have exercise enough to make saints of us.

True, our vocation excludes certain means of sanctifying ourselves which God has provided for persons differently situated. But what we lose in one way can be made good in another. Thus, if religious poverty does not allow me to give material alms, I can bestow spiritual alms instead : my prayers and sacrifices will take the place of money. Again, the contemplative life forbids the apostolate of external ministrations ; but I can exercise an apostolate by the labours of the interior life : instead of running around the world in pursuit of sinners, I can plead their cause before God. The active life allows only in very restricted measure the sweet and holy occupations of Mary ; but I can sanctify myself by exercising my activities from obedience, with devotion and purity of intention, and by keeping myself habitually in the presence of God. If only we make the most of the means our different vocations provide us with, we shall there find enough to conduct us to the very summit of perfection. Have not there been saints in every religious Order, and in every rank of society ? We admit that some situations are in themselves more favourable than others. But for each of us the *only* good situation is the one which has the sanction and blessing of the divine will.

If sickness prevents me from observing the regular fasts and abstinence, or from assisting in choir, I can sing the praises of God in my heart ; I can impose a rigid abstinence on my judgment and will ; I can make my eyes fast, and my tongue, and my heart, and all my senses, by sincere mortification. What I might have gained by fulfilling the duties proper to those in health, I can make up for by fidelity to those incumbent on the sick, such as patience, renunciation, obedience and abandonment.

Should obedience, or some other such cause, deprive me of certain regular observances or private devotions, I can easily repair the loss, in the first place by cheerfully discharging the duties of my new position, then “ by



applying myself to redouble, not my aspirations or my exercises, but the perfection with which I perform them, endeavouring thereby to gain more in one single act (as is undoubtedly possible) than in a hundred others due in greater degree to my own choice and preference.”<sup>6</sup>

After all, is not the conformity of our wills to the will of God our one means of advancing in virtue? Why then should we disquiet ourselves, so long as we are zealous for our obligations as Christians, for our regular observances, and for our private devotions, and give up none of them through our own fault but only in compliance with the divine good-pleasure? God alone is responsible, and to make good the loss He has a thousand means at His disposal, the principal of which is just our readiness to forsake our own wills, even in what appears to us good and holy, in order to follow His.

IV.—Our lives are consecrated to contemplation by the exercises of piety, which form, as it were, the nourishment of our souls. And now obedience, additional work, or especially sickness, comes to break the chain of our devotional practices. Now you can no longer assist at Holy Mass, even on Sundays, and you are deprived of the sacred aliment of Communion. Soon you will find yourself, perhaps, in such a state of weakness as to be incapable of prayer. Do not complain. Our Lord wills to make you participate in His own nourishment, which possibly you do not sufficiently appreciate: “My meat,” He has said, “is to do the will of Him That sent Me, that I may perfect His work” (*John* iv, 34). Now this work which He designs to accomplish in us and with us is the work of our perfection. And for that it is necessary that we should die to our own wills, even in the practices of piety, so that the will of God alone may reign in us. On one occasion, when Father Alvarez was debating with himself whether in spite of some impediment he ought to celebrate Mass, he heard a voice saying to him: “This most holy act may be for you exceedingly profitable or

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<sup>6</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Entret.*, vii.

exceedingly prejudicial according as I approve or disapprove." On another occasion God said to him: "My glory is not found in particular actions or exercises, but in the accomplishment of My will. Who knows as well as I what is best calculated to glorify My name?"<sup>7</sup>

Unquestionably, we ought to have a great zeal for our practices of piety, particularly for Mass and Holy Communion, and should never neglect them through distaste, or dryness, or any other such cause. But even our piety must be regulated in accordance with the adorable will of God, otherwise it will become inordinate. "There are souls," says St. Francis de Sales, "who, after ridding themselves of attachments to dangerous objects, continue to entertain dangerous and superfluous affections, because they continue to be unduly attached to what God does not will for them." Thus, he continues, "our exercises of piety (which, however, we ought to love very dearly) can become irregular when we prefer them to obedience or to the common good, or when we regard them as an end in themselves, whereas they are but means and ways to our end, which is divine love."<sup>8</sup>

Another reason for which God may see fit to deprive us of our pious practices is to give us the merit of suffering. For three days a certain religieuse had been unable to visit Our Lord in the sacred Tabernacle, to assist at Mass, or to receive Holy Communion. "O my God," she cried, "Thou wilt compensate me in eternity for these three days. Thou wilt make up for this deprivation by showing Thyself to me in greater beauty and magnificence. As a substitute for the Eucharistic Bread Thou hast given me the bread of suffering. . . . In suffering, we give God more than in prayer." Besides, the cross is necessary for us. Our Lord might have answered this religieuse: "When I desire to conduct a soul to the summit of perfection, I offer her the cross and the Eucharist. These two complete each other. The

<sup>7</sup> Du Pont, *op. cit.*, c. i

<sup>8</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, x, c. v.

cross makes you love and long for the Eucharist. The Eucharist makes you first accept, then love, and therefore long for the cross. The cross purifies and disposes the soul and prepares her for the Divine Banquet. The Eucharist nourishes and fortifies the soul, helps her to carry the cross, and supports her on the weary way to Calvary. What precious gifts are the cross and the Eucharist! They are the gifts which God bestows on His true friends."

In St. Alphonsus we have a touching example both of generous fidelity to the practices of piety and of not less generous abandonment to the divine good-pleasure. Until his infirmities and obedience confined him to his poor little cell, his ecstatic transports before the Blessed Sacrament grew very frequent and attracted general attention. Finally, his superior, Villani, forbade him to go down any more to the church. He obeyed. But what must it have cost him to renounce the joy of kneeling at the feet of Jesus, his only Love in this world! Sometimes he would forget the prohibition, and would drag himself as far as the stairs, as if drawn by an irresistible attraction. He would endeavour to descend, but in vain. And then, dissolved in tears, he would return to his cell. Or he would be reminded of the superior's prohibition, whereupon he would reply: "Very well. O good Jesus, it is better, through obedience, to remain at a distance from Thee than, contrary to obedience, to enjoy Thy presence." It cost him still more to be unable to say Mass. When he recalled the heavenly joys he had so often experienced at the altar, his grief found vent in sobs and tears. Then he would console himself with this act of resignation: "O Jesus, it is Thy will that I should no more celebrate Holy Mass. May Thy adorable will, not mine, be done." <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Berthe, *op. cit.*, I, vi, c. xiii.

## CHAPTER VIII

ON ABANDONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL VARIETIES OF THE  
COMMON WAY—(*continued*). FAILURES AND FAULTS

### ARTICLE I.—FAILURES IN THE WORKS OF ZEAL

**L**ET us treat first “of certain moral or spiritual goods, such as the exercise of works of zeal, the direction of enterprises of charity,” all our exterior activities designed for the glory of God.

Perhaps Providence does not demand any such service from us. In that case, remarks Dosda, “the true love of God obliges or counsels us to sacrifice the secondary goods to the supreme good, which is the divine will. With regard to this point, certain people, excellent in other respects, sometimes fall into a dangerous mistake by confounding the love of God with the love of good. The two things are quite distinct. Circumstances may arise where we should be bound to abandon the good which God does not demand of us, in order to attach ourselves to Him alone and to surrender ourselves absolutely to His Divine Providence.”

When Providence applies us to external works of zeal, we must seek only God, and by supernatural intentions. “The pursuit of the good,” continues the same author, “is not true charity when we pursue it with a bad intention, or even when we pursue it for its own sake. Divine charity does undoubtedly will the good, but only for God’s sake. What discouragements, what jealousies, what pettinesses do we not witness amongst those who are more attached to the good than to the will of God! Their efforts in well-doing often miscarry, and they are disappointed and depressed. They observe others participating in their enterprises and they grow jealous. In order to succeed in their undertakings, they do not scruple to discredit or to oppose their collaborators in the same

grand work, the work of Redemption. They just love themselves, and prefer the human good to the divine. They pretend to be going towards Jesus Christ, but they make an easy and often an unsuspected detour which brings them back to themselves. They do not know how wide a difference there is between the man devoted to good and the man of God. How many workers, brilliant in outward show, remain barren in results, because the love of self, rather than the love of God, has had the chief influence in forming and inspiring them?"<sup>1</sup>

Not alone must we be careful to preserve purity of intention in all our enterprises, but we must also firmly attach ourselves to our duty, that is to say, to the sole will of God, and we must make ourselves virtuously indifferent to failure or success. On the one hand, we are reasonably sure that God wills this work for us at the moment; but, on the other hand, we never know what His future intentions may be. "Very often, in order to exercise us in holy indifference (even as to what regards His service) He inspires us with noble undertakings, the success of which, however, He does not will."<sup>2</sup> Thus Providence appears to be playing with us. But the play is for us very profitable, indeed, since we always win even whilst losing. For we derive from it, God so arranging, the merit of our pious intentions, the merit of our conscientious labour, and the merit of a trial patiently endured. On the other hand, perhaps success would have occasioned the loss of our humility, our detachment, and of other virtues besides. "Nevertheless, we must not allow such considerations to paralyse our efforts or to diminish our zeal. We must neglect nothing that is required for the success of the enterprise which God has placed in our hands; but at the same time we are to be so disposed that should it issue in failure, we shall support the disappointment with meekness and calm. For, on the one hand, we are commanded to exercise great care

<sup>1</sup> *L'Union avec Dieu*, 4<sup>e</sup> P., cc. iii et x.

<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, 1, ix, c. vi.

in everything which concerns the glory of God and of which we have charge; whilst, on the other, we have no obligation or charge with respect to the sequence of events, since it lies altogether beyond our control. Therefore, just as we are obliged to carry on the work with confidence, courage and constancy, as far as it is possible for us; so should we accept meekly and tranquilly whatever result it may please God to appoint for our labour.”<sup>3</sup> Our holy father, St. Bernard, preached the second crusade only at the express command of the Sovereign Pontiff. He confirmed his words by miracles beyond number. Several prodigies, following the disaster, attested the fact that he had truly accomplished the divine will. And yet the expedition proved most unfortunate, and aroused a storm of accusations and abuse against the holy preacher. He felt his position very keenly. The Blessed John of Casamari wrote as follows to console him: “If the crusaders had conducted themselves like true Christians, the Lord would have been with them. Even when they abandoned themselves to vice, He answered their malice with His clemency. He visited them with tribulations only in order to purify their souls and bring them to paradise. Numbers of them died avowing that they were glad to leave this world, because they feared they would relapse into vice if they returned to their native countries. As for you, blessed father, the Lord gave you the gifts of eloquence and of miracles for this enterprise because He knew what fruit He would derive therefrom.” If, therefore, the enterprise was a failure in the estimation of men, according to the designs of Providence it had succeeded. It did not deliver the Church of the Orient, but it sent many new saints to the Church Triumphant in heaven. St. Bernard, despite his affliction, humbly adored the judgments of God, welcomed them with meek resignation, and said: “If men must murmur, I prefer that they murmur against me rather than against the Lord. I esteem myself happy to serve Him

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<sup>3</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. vi.

as a buckler. Gladly will I expose myself to the keen arrows of the maligners, to the poisoned darts of the blasphemers, provided He is spared. I count my own glory as naught, if only His be respected.”<sup>4</sup>

We borrow the following examples from St. Francis de Sales : “ St. Louis, acting under a divine inspiration, crossed the sea to conquer the Holy Land. The expedition resulted in failure, and he meekly acquiesced in the good-pleasure of God. To me, the tranquillity of his resignation appears even more admirable than the magnanimity of his design. St. Francis of Assisi went to Egypt in order to convert the infidels or to win the martyr’s crown ; such was the will of God. He returned, nevertheless, without accomplishing the one or the other ; and such was also the will of God. St. Anthony of Padua likewise longed for martyrdom, and he likewise failed to obtain his wish. St. Ignatius of Loyola, having with immense labour founded the Society of Jesus, by which he already witnessed so many magnificent services rendered to the Church, and foresaw others still more magnificent, had nevertheless the courage to promise himself that if he saw it suppressed, although that would be the greatest affliction that could befall him in this life, one half-hour’s mental prayer would suffice to restore his peace of mind and to conform his will to the holy will of God.”<sup>5</sup> We could cite a multitude of similar examples, amongst them the example of St. Francis de Sales himself. When the existence of his Institute of the Visitation was threatened, soon after its establishment, by the severe illness of its foundress, St. Jane de Chantal, he said : “ Ah, well ! God will be satisfied with the sacrifice of our good-will, as in the case of Abraham. The Lord has inspired us with great hopes, the Lord has disappointed them : blessed be the name of the Lord.”<sup>6</sup> “ I always think of our Congregation,” said St. Alphonsus,

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<sup>4</sup> *De. Consid.*, I, ii, c. i.

<sup>5</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. vi.

<sup>6</sup> *Esprit*, 6<sup>e</sup> P., x.

“ as a ship in the open sea, buffeted by contrary winds. If God wills that it should be swallowed up in the abyss, I say in advance, and shall ever say : Blest be His holy will !” <sup>7</sup>

“ Oh, how happy are these souls,” exclaims St. Francis de Sales, “ strong and bold in the enterprises with which God has inspired them, yet ready to abandon these same enterprises with meek resignation when God so wills ! This is the proof of a perfect indifference : to desist from well-doing when such is God’s good-pleasure, and to return from the half-finished journey when the divine will, which is our guide, so ordains.” Oh, how such abandonment in failure glorifies God and enriches us ! On the contrary, how little supernatural they show themselves to be, who allow disquietude, disappointment and discouragement to take possession of their hearts ! “ Jonas did very wrong in yielding to sadness because in his judgment God had failed to fulfil his prophecy with regard to Ninive. The Prophet accomplished the divine will in announcing the destruction of that city, but he mingled his own interest and his own will with the will of God. Hence when he saw that his prediction was not literally verified he grew angry and began to murmur. Now, if the divine good-pleasure had been the one motive of his actions, he would have been as well satisfied to see it accomplished in the pardon which Ninive had merited by its penitence, as in the punishment it had deserved by its guilt. We would have all our enterprises and undertakings completely successful, but we have no right to expect that God will invariably humour such natural desires.” <sup>8</sup>

Suppose an enterprise has failed through our own fault, for instance, through lack of zeal or prudence : even in this case should we acquiesce in the will of God ? Most certainly. For although He condemns the fault, He wills the punishment. “ He was not the cause of David’s sin,

<sup>7</sup> Berthe, *op. cit.*, I, vi, c. ii.

<sup>8</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. vi.



but He inflicted the punishment due to that sin. Neither was He the cause of the sin of Saul, but in punishment thereof He ordained Saul's defeat. So whenever in punishment of our faults our holy designs miscarry, we must detest the faults by a true repentance and accept the penalty imposed. For if the sin is opposed to the divine will, its chastisement is in accordance therewith." <sup>9</sup>

In short, all our undertakings for the glory of God require His action and ours. "Our part is to plant and to irrigate well, with the assistance of grace, but it is for God to give the increase." <sup>10</sup> We must therefore do all that lies in our power, and leave the issue in the hands of Divine Providence.

#### ARTICLE II.—THE WANT OF SUCCESS IN WHAT CONCERNS OUR OWN SANCTIFICATION

The same applies to the work of our sanctification. Progress in virtue and the correction of our shortcomings demand at the same time the action of God and our co-operation therewith. Now, grace has been promised to prayer and fidelity. Nevertheless, the Lord remains always Master of His gifts, both as regards their measure and as to their time and other circumstances.

Nothing can be more precious to us than the sanctification of our souls. Our Father in heaven also has this very much at heart. So far as depends upon us, we should entertain very ambitious desires in this respect and conceive the loftiest aspirations. Why should we not count upon Our Lord, Who gave His life for us upon the cross, Who offers Himself daily for us upon our altars, and Who has chosen for us a vocation so rich in promise? Provided our good-will rests not upon ourselves, but on Him, the only fear we need have is the fear of not desiring enough, or of allowing divine grace to remain unproductive. Let us, consequently, desire, pray, labour with due order and

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*, I, ix, c. vi.

method; when necessary, let us reanimate our fervour, and never grow remiss in this sacred work. But let us abandon the issue to our heavenly Father. Or rather let us leave to Him all that regards the measure, the time, the form, and the other circumstances of success. This will enable us to banish disquietude, over-eagerness, and all such defects in our pursuit of our ultimate end.

As to what concerns our progress in the virtues, "let us omit nothing," says St. Francis de Sales, "that might help to secure success in this holy enterprise. . . . But when we have planted and watered, it is from Divine Providence we must expect the fruit of our desires and our labours. If we do not feel ourselves making such progress in the devout life as we should wish, let us not be troubled about that, let us preserve our souls in peace and let tranquillity always reign in our hearts. Our business is to cultivate our souls properly, and to this work, therefore, we must faithfully apply ourselves. But as for the abundance of the harvest; we must leave the care of that to Our Lord. The husbandman cannot reasonably be blamed for not having a good crop, provided he has not neglected to till the ground and to sow the seed. Nor should it worry us if we see ourselves always as novices in the practice of the virtues. For in the monastery of the devout life, we should all of us and always esteem ourselves novices: our whole life here is intended to be a probation. And in fact there is no clearer indication that one is really a novice still, and a novice deserving of expulsion, than to imagine oneself professed. . . . In fine, the obligation of serving God and advancing in His holy love must continue until the last moment of our lives." <sup>11</sup>

The same holy Doctor put St. Jane de Chantal on her guard against "certain desires which tyrannise over the heart. They would have our projects encounter no opposition; they cannot endure darkness, but wish to be always in the fulness of light; they are not satisfied with

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I, x, c. vii; et *Entret.*, vii.

refusing consent to temptations, they want us not even to feel them." This prudent director desired for his spiritual daughter "a great courage, which would not be over-sensitive, which would be indifferent as to sweet or bitter, light or darkness, which would advance bravely in the essential, strong, and inflexible love of God, regardless of the flitting phantoms of temptation." <sup>12</sup>

Besides, ill-success in this matter must very often be more apparent than real. For it is impossible that we should not be continually advancing, even without our being conscious of the fact, so long as we do all that depends upon ourselves, that is to say, so long as we have the good-will to make progress and prove this good-will by serious efforts. Our holy father, St. Bernard, has given us the consoling assurance that "the constant will to advance and the steady pursuit of perfection are accounted perfection." <sup>13</sup> But let it be carefully noted that the Saint speaks not of sentiment but of pursuit. Provided the will remains firmly attached to duty, repugnances can be despised. The great Apostle himself experienced opposition from the old man, but he ignored it and went calmly on his way. Sentiment is an equally unreliable criterion. Since the virtues belong to the spiritual order, we may possess them without feeling their presence. It is by their fruits we have to judge. For instance, this person abounds in consolations and at prayer pours out his heart in tender effusions; but he remains wanting in generosity and cannot support trials: his love is still in its infancy. Here is another whose heart is as dry as the desert; but he is always at the post of duty, satisfied with having to bear the cross, receiving reprimands and contradictions with a smiling countenance: is not his love a hundred times more real and solid? St. Jane de Chantal shed hot tears in the conviction that she had neither faith, hope, nor charity. And to console her, St. Francis de Sales wrote the following: "That is

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<sup>12</sup> *Lettre*, 429.

<sup>13</sup> *Epist.*, 254.

a mere bluntness of sensibility which deprives you only of the enjoyment of your virtues. You really possess them, all the same, and in a flourishing condition, too. But God wills that you should not feel their comforting presence in your soul." <sup>14</sup>

Observe finally that, in addition to grace and goodwill, we must have time. Just as time is necessary for the full development of our bodies and our faculties, for intellectual culture or the acquisition of the arts, so is it requisite for the attainment of lofty virtue. Happy the saints who, labouring with an almost furious zeal, never resting or relaxing, have thus accumulated an immense fortune of virtues and merits! And happy shall we also be, in our lesser measure, if, not being able to carry on so extensive a business, we manage to realise even a fourth or one-half of their gains, if we are not found to have fallen too far short of our models! There is one thought that should serve as a constant goad to our spiritual activity: the reward will be proportionate to the labour, and the Divine Master will take account of both quantity and quality.

With regard to our passions and failings, we should maintain the same attitude of truceless war and peaceful abandonment. "God," says St. Francis de Sales, "permits the rebellions of the sensitive appetite, both in the matter of anger and lust, to continue in us. He does so to discipline us, in order that by the resistance we make we may exercise spiritual valour. These represent the Philistine foes whom the true Israelites have always to combat without ever being able to crush: they can be weakened, indeed, but never annihilated. For the passions only die with ourselves: their life is as long as our own. Their motions are undoubtedly to be hated and detested, because they proceed from sin and perpetually tend to sin. . . . The Church has condemned the error of certain solitaries who said that in this world we can be entirely free from the passions of anger, lust, fear and

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<sup>14</sup> De Chaugy, *Vie de Ste. J. de Chant.*, P. III, c. xxvi.

the like. . . . However, we should not be troubled at feeling their presence, because our perfection consists in combatting them, and we cannot combat them unless we feel them, or conquer without encountering them. Our victory depends not on being insensible to their suggestions, but on refusing consent to them. And if, for the preservation of our humility, it is necessary that we sometimes suffer wounds in this spiritual warfare; on the other hand, we cannot be conquered so long as we do not lose either our life or our courage.”<sup>15</sup>

We must, therefore, make up our minds to carry on the struggle with patience and perseverance, but in tranquillity and peace of soul. When we have fully accomplished all that lies in our power, we have discharged our whole duty; the rest belongs to Providence. But considering the persistence and pertinacity of these conflicts, always beginning and never coming to an end, “the poor soul is troubled, afflicted, agitated, and believes she does well in yielding to sadness, as if such sadness were caused by the love of God. And yet, Theotime, it is not divine love that produces this melancholy, for divine love is saddened by nothing except sin; it is rather our own self-love which would have us exempt from the labour involved in resistance to our passions. It is really the trouble of making the necessary effort that disquiets us”<sup>16</sup>—unless it be the humiliation and shame caused by our experiencing certain evil motions.

“But still,” someone may say, “if I know that my multiplied faults have prevented my progress in virtue, and that my negligence is responsible for the persistence of my defects: how can I help being troubled?” In this way: implore forgiveness of God, detest your faults, accept humbly the pain and confusion arising from them; then without losing your time, your peace, and your courage in useless regrets, strive with all diligence to

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<sup>15</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ix, c. vii.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*, *ibid.*

make better progress in the future. But you must preserve your tranquillity of heart: trouble is not a remedy for evil, but a new evil in itself, and discouragement is of all plagues the worst. Moreover, even our very faults are no obstacle to our progress if we rise from them promptly, and without scruple or disquietude proceed on our way. They impart to us, according to St. Gregory, "the very uncommon perfection which consists in knowing that we are not perfect." They are the veil under which God conceals our virtues from us in order to preserve us from pride. They give us occasion for the renewal of a humble vigilance over ourselves and of fervour in prayer. They also serve to instruct us in what we need to know, and urge us as a goad to quicken our steps. Finally, the faults themselves can become a source of profit, for him who knows how to turn them to account.

#### ARTICLE III.—WANT OF SUCCESS IN DEALING WITH SOULS

In the exercise of zeal for souls, as in all other occupations, we must do everything that depends upon us with a wise and constant fervour, but in peaceful abandonment to the good-pleasure of God. What He requires from us is not success but the conscientious discharge of our duties. And our first duty is to learn to love souls *in God*. In proportion as the fire of divine love increases in our hearts it should produce the flame of holy zeal, of a truly catholic zeal, as wide as the world.

Certain souls will become especially dear to us, either because we have special charge of them, or for some other particular reason. But it is in the light of eternity that we must consider them all. The Sovereign Judge will demand an account of them, the demon is plotting to lead them astray, and perhaps the salvation of many of them depends upon us. We must give God to them and we must give them, all of them and absolutely, to God. The heavenly Father sacrificed His only-begotten Son, the

eternal object of His complacency, so that the world might not perish but might have life everlasting. Our Lord immolated Himself for souls on the cross, offers Himself for them every instant on our altars, nourishes them with His own Substance, has given them the Church, the priesthood, the Sacraments, and constantly favours them with a superabundance of interior and exterior graces. By His Holy Spirit, moreover, He enlightens, attracts, urges, circumvents them; He conquers and sustains them; He pursues, recalls and pardons them. In short, He loves them, loves them almost infinitely in spite of their many miseries. A beautiful example of disinterested love, which has profoundly touched the saints and which should confound our tepidity. However ardent may be our zeal for souls, can it ever compare with the zeal God exhibits?

We must love souls as God loves them, conforming ourselves to His guidance and to the order of His Providence. Having created us free, He will never do violence to our liberty. But He imparts His graces to all in abundance, to some more, to others less, in the measure, time and manner that best pleases Him. We likewise must give to all, particularly to those who ought to be specially dear to us, the assistance of our prayers, sacrifices and good example. We must devote special attention to public prayer, if we are honoured with that sublime apostolate. Should souls be entrusted to our care on one title or another, we must cultivate them with a zeal proportionate to the love God bears them, to the worth they possess in His estimation. But while faithfully fulfilling our duties and praying with unflagging fervour, we must preserve our peace of mind, through respect for the rights of God and for the order of His Providence. For He is Master of His gifts, and has judged it well to endow human souls with the faculty of free choice.

Disappointments will not be wanting to us. God Himself, although possessing the key to all hearts, will nevertheless not enter by force, but stands at the door and

knocks. Here we encounter the mystery of divine grace and human co-operation. One hastens to welcome the Visitor, another refuses to open, many pay no attention at all: so that often enough He has to remain outside. Our sweet Saviour, our Benefactor and Friend above all friends, came into His own domain and His own chosen people, and His own would not receive Him. The malicious sought to catch Him in His words, the multitude abandoned Him, Judas betrayed Him, the other Apostles fled from Him; and when He fell at last beneath the blows of His enemies, His Church was but a delicate plant buffeted by the tempest. The disciple is not above his Master. Hence, despite the prodigies they wrought, the Apostles finished their careers by martyrdom, leaving behind them a defenceless flock in the midst of ravening wolves. If some of the saints had astonishing success in their labours for souls, others, and these not the least in sanctity, laboured without apparent result even to the end of their lives. To mention only the case of St. Alphonsus. His first disciples forsook him, and, in consequence, how many others either left him of their own accord or had to be dismissed! Two of them went so far as to ruin his credit with the Sovereign Pontiff and cause his expulsion from his Congregation. All these failures were necessary to perfect the founder in holiness and to establish his Institute firmly on the unshakeable rock of Calvary. Still, as the designs of heaven are only revealed to us gradually, it is no small trial for a zealous priest to see souls in danger, or for a zealous superior to be obliged to leave in mediocrity those whom he had hoped to lead to sanctity.

Howsoever bitter may be our lack of success, we must recognise in it the permission of God, accept it with peaceful abandonment, and turn it to account for our own spiritual progress. It is one of the very best occasions for entrenching ourselves more securely in humility, detaching ourselves from vainglory and human consolations, purifying our intentions, and resolving for the future to



seek God alone in our spiritual ministrations. With the Royal Prophet, we should bless Providence in the humiliation we have received. Only too often, success blinds, inflates, and intoxicates us. It makes us forget that conversions come from God, and that they are due perhaps, not to our efforts, but to the secret prayers and sacrifices of some unsuspected soul. Failure opens our eyes to the reality of things. It reminds us that we are only poor instruments at best. It invites us to turn our gaze back upon ourselves, and, if there is need, to correct our shortcomings, to rectify our methods, to reanimate our zeal, and to pray more. If our negligence and sins have contributed to our want of success, we must not only rid ourselves of these failings, but we are also bound to repair the consequences of them so far as possible, by redoubling our zeal, our prayers, and our sacrifices.

Humble resignation to God's will should not, however, cause our ardour to cool. When souls fail to correspond to our efforts, "let us weep for them," says St. Francis de Sales, "let us sigh, let us pray for them, as did our sweet Jesus, Who, after shedding tears all His life over sinners, died for them at last with His eyes dimmed from weeping and His whole Body bathed in Blood."<sup>17</sup> Condemned, betrayed, abandoned, He could have preserved His life and left us in our obstinacy. But He loved us unto the end. Thus He teaches us that true charity never yields to discouragement. She knows that very often she will at length triumph over the most obstinate resistance. She hopes all things, because she puts her hope in God Who can do all things. If compassionate love failed finally in the case of Judas, it made saints of the Magdalen, Peter, Augustine, and so many other holy penitents. Humility, which reveals to us our own wretchedness and faults, makes us understand clearly the difficulties of virtue, and inspires us with a tender compassion for souls that are still weak. "How do you know," asks the gentle Bishop of Geneva, "whether the

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<sup>17</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, 1, ix, c. viii.

sinner will not, perhaps, do penance and save his soul? So long as there is room for hope, and whilst there is life there is hope, we must not abandon him, but must rather pray for him and help him as much as his malice will allow us." <sup>18</sup>

But if souls disappoint our hopes of them, provided we have spared no efforts in their behalf we shall not be held accountable for their loss: we have done our duty, we have glorified God and rejoiced His merciful Heart in what concerns ourselves. In such circumstances, the sense of our insufficiency or of our responsibilities should not disquiet us. Our holy father, St. Bernard, reassures us on this point in his letter to the Blessed Baldwin, his disciple: "You will have to answer for that which you have," he says, "but not for that which you do not possess. Be ready with your account, but only for the talent entrusted to you. With regard to the rest, you can make your mind easy. If much has been given you, much also shall be required. If you have received only a little, be faithful in rendering that little back. . . . Render back all, for all shall be exacted, even to the last farthing: I mean all that which you have been entrusted with, not that which you have not." <sup>19</sup>

"But at last, when we have wept in vain over the obstinate sinner, when we have rendered him all the duties of charity in order to save him from perdition, let us imitate Our Lord and the Apostles. That is to say, let us divert our minds and energies to other objects and other occupations more conducive to the glory of God. For we must not waste in lamenting the loss of some the time that is useful and necessary for the salvation of others. Besides, we must adore, love and praise for ever the avenging and punishing justice of God, as we love and praise His mercy. For by His grace He wills to make us good as He Himself is sovereignly good; by His justice He wills to punish sin, because He hates it.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Epist.*, 201.

Now, the reason why He hates it is because, being sovereignly good, He necessarily detests the sovereign evil, which is sin. And always, whether it punishes or blesses, His good-pleasure is adorable, amiable, worthy of eternal benediction. Hence the just who sing the praises of His mercy towards such as shall be saved, will also rejoice at seeing His vengeance, as the Psalmist says. . . . And the holy angels, having exercised their charity with respect to the human creatures to whom they were assigned as guardians, remain in peace, even when they see their *protégés* continuing obdurate or finally lost. We must likewise acquiesce in the will of God, and we must kiss with equal love and reverence the right hand of His mercy and the left of His justice.”<sup>20</sup>

We shall encounter other trials also in the conduct of souls. Each of them is providentially designed to make us practise detachment from persons and things, to excite in us an absolutely pure zeal, and to lead us to holy abandonment. For example, there are souls that give us complete satisfaction. God will take them from us in a manner we never expected. Far from murmuring, we must kiss the hand that has wounded us. Is it not our part to lead souls to God? We have enjoyed the sweet consolation of success in our work. It is for Him we have formed them: they belong more to Him than to us. If He judges well to deprive us of the joy of their presence and of our most cherished hopes, is it not right that His will should prevail over ours, His infinite wisdom over our short-sightedness, our own eternal interests over our transient consolations?

#### ARTICLE IV.—OUR OWN FAULTS

Let us speak now of our own actual faults.

And first of all, though we should always be most zealous in the avoidance of sin, we must nevertheless

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<sup>20</sup> Saint Francis de Sales, *ibid.*

maintain ourselves in peaceful resignation to the order of Providence. For, as St. Francis de Sales remarks, "whilst God hates sin with a sovereign hatred, He yet in His wisdom permits it, in order to allow His rational creatures to act according to their natures, and to render the good more commendable for that, having the power to transgress the law, they do not actually transgress it. Let us therefore adore and bless this holy permission. But because Providence, though permitting sin, hates it infinitely, we, too, must detest and hate it. We must desire with all the ardour of which we are capable that the evil permitted—in this sense—should not be committed. Consequently we should employ every possible means to prevent its birth, its growth, and its dominion. Let us imitate Our Lord, Who never ceases exhorting, promising, threatening, forbidding, commanding, inspiring within us, in order to turn our wills from evil without depriving them of their liberty."<sup>21</sup> If we persevere without flagging in prayer, vigilance, and fighting, our faults as we advance will become less frequent, less voluntary, and more easily repaired; and our souls will be established in a progressive purity. However, apart from a very special grace, such as was bestowed on the Blessed Virgin, it is impossible in this life to avoid all venial sins. The saints themselves have acknowledged as much.

Whenever we have the misfortune to commit a fault, "let us do what we can to repair it: Our Lord assured Carpus that He was ready, if necessary, to suffer death again in order to deliver one single soul from sin. But our repentance should be strong, resolute, constant, tranquil, not turbulent, uneasy, or despondent."<sup>22</sup> "It is not because I have been preserved from mortal sin," says St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, "that I raise myself to God in confidence and love. Ah, no! I feel that even if I had on my conscience all the crimes that could possibly

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<sup>21</sup> *Op. cit.*, c. vii et viii.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*, *op. cit.*, 1, ix, c. viii.

be committed, I should still lose nothing of my confidence. I should simply go, my heart breaking with repentant sorrow, and throw myself into the arms of my Saviour. I know how He cherished the poor prodigal son. I have heard His words to St. Magdalen, and to the woman taken in adultery, and to the Samaritan woman. No, nothing could shake my confidence, because I know the love and compassion of Him on Whom I rely. I know that all the sins of the world would be instantly lost in the infinity of His mercy, as a drop of water thrown into a blazing furnace.”<sup>23</sup>

Let us not, therefore, imitate those to whom a peaceful repentance seems always a paradox. Is there not a golden mean between the indifference dreaded by their spirit of faith and the chagrin and despondency which throw them into impatience? We cannot be too much on our guard against the agitation excited in us by our sins. Instead of being a remedy, it is a new evil. Furthermore, bad as our faults may be in themselves, they become still worse in their consequences, when they give rise to uneasiness, discouragement, or perhaps even despair. On the contrary, peace in repentance is a thing very desirable. “St. Catherine of Sienna committed certain faults. When in consequence she afflicted herself before the Lord, He made her understand that by a repentance, simple, prompt, fervent, and trustful, she pleased Him more than if she had never transgressed at all. All the saints had their shortcomings. Some amongst them, as David and St. Peter, were great sinners, and perhaps they would never have become great saints if they had not first been great sinners. As St. Paul teaches us: all things co-operate into good for the elect—even their sins, adds St. Augustine.”<sup>24</sup>

There is, indeed, an art of utilising our faults. The great secret is to accept humbly, not, of course, the fault itself or the injury done to God, but the interior

<sup>23</sup> *Histoire*, c. xi.

<sup>24</sup> De Lombez, *Paix inter.*, 4<sup>e</sup> P., c. vii.

humiliation and the confusion inflicted on our self-love, so as to establish ourselves in humility, confident and peaceful. Is not pride the principal cause of our failings? Now, it is a powerful remedy against this pest to accept the shame as something we have only too well deserved. We can escape easily enough from other kinds of humiliation by persuading ourselves that they are unjust. But how avoid the confusion and the cruel lesson of our own faults? They exhibit in full light both our native depravity and our cowardice in the combat. Humiliations, properly accepted, lead to humility. Humility, in its turn, by constantly reminding us of the lost time we have to redeem and the faults we have to expiate, nourishes compunction of heart, stimulates our spiritual activity, and teaches us to be merciful to others.

On this point, De Caussade has some very wise reflections: "God permits our little infidelities in order to convince us more intimately of our weakness, and to make us die gradually to this unhappy self-esteem, this presumption, and this secret confidence in ourselves which prevent us from acquiring true humility of heart. We know well that nothing can be more agreeable to God than a complete contempt of self, accompanied with absolute confidence in Him alone. The God of goodness does us, consequently, a singular favour when He obliges us to drink, often against our wills, this bitter chalice so dreaded by our self-love and our corrupt nature. Without that, we should never be cured of our secret presumption, and our proud self-confidence. We should never understand how all the evil in us comes necessarily from ourselves, and all the good from God alone. A million personal experiences of another kind would be required to give us an habitual hold on this double truth. And the number should be doubled where the vices of pride and presumption, hidden in the soul, have acquired greater vigour and struck deeper root. These faults are therefore very salutary, inasmuch as they serve to keep us always little and confounded before the Divine Majesty, always dis-

trustful of ourselves, always annihilated in our own eyes. Nothing, indeed, is easier than to avail ourselves of each of our infidelities in order to acquire a new degree of humility and to dig deeper in our hearts, so to speak, the necessary foundation of all true sanctity. Should we not admire and bless the infinite goodness of God Who can thus draw our greatest advantage from our very shortcomings? And for this He only requires that we should not love our shortcomings, that we should gently humble ourselves on their account, that we should rise again with unwearied constancy after each of our falls, and that we should assiduously labour to correct them.”<sup>25</sup>

With regard to the penal consequences of our sins, if God wills that we cannot lawfully escape them, we must accept them with humble conformity to His good-pleasure. It may be, for example, the shame we feel before our brethren, or the loss of our reputation, or the harm done to our health. Perhaps our negligence, our indiscretions, our detractions, our displays of ill-temper, or our peevish character, has brought upon us unpleasantnesses, humiliations, mortifications, prejudice to our interests. Our faults will leave behind them an evil legacy of trouble, preoccupation of mind, and painful anxiety. Now, God has not willed the fault, but He does will the consequences of it. He makes us suffer in order to cure us. He punishes us in time so that He may not have to punish us in eternity. “Lord,” let us say to Him, “I have richly deserved this chastisement. Thou hast permitted it, even in a sense positively willed it. May Thy holy will be done! I adore it and humbly submit to its ordinances.” Let us thus humble ourselves, yet without trouble, bitterness, disquietude, or discouragement, remembering that God, whilst hating the fault, employs it nevertheless as a useful instrument to keep us in abjection and self-contempt.

It is with the same filial and peaceful conformity we must accept the penal consequences of our simple

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<sup>25</sup> *Abandon*, 2<sup>e</sup> P., iii, 15.

imprudences. According to De Caussade: "There is hardly a trial more mortifying to self-love, and consequently more sanctifying, than that which results from some inculpable imprudence. It does not cost us nearly as much to accept the humiliations which come from outside, and which we have not brought upon ourselves in any way. We resign ourselves also much more easily to the confusion caused by faults graver in themselves, provided they do not appear externally. But a simple imprudence which has vexatious consequences, visible to every eye: this assuredly is the most humbling of all humiliations. And therefore it gives us an excellent occasion for dealing the death-blow to self-love. We must never fail to profit by such an opportunity. What one has to do then is to take one's heart in both hands, and despite its resistance oblige it to make an act of complete resignation. That is the moment when it is necessary to say and to repeat the *fiat* of perfect abandonment. We must even force ourselves forward as far as an act of thanksgiving, and add to our *fiat* a *Gloria Patri*. One single trial thus accepted will bring the soul farther on the road to perfection than numerous acts of virtue." <sup>26</sup>

St. Francis de Sales "was never impatient with himself, or even with his own imperfections. The hatred he entertained for his faults was peaceful, calm, and strong. He considered that we punished ourselves better by a tranquil and constant repentance than by a repentance that is bitter, impatient, and choleric; because the latter with its impetuosity is more in accordance with our inclinations than with the gravity of the faults. 'As for me,' he said, 'if I had the unhappiness to fall into great sin, I should not reproach my heart in this fashion: Are you not utterly miserable and abominable to allow yourself, after so many resolutions, to be thus carried away by vanity? You should die of shame, and never again raise up your eyes to heaven, blind and impudent as you are, a traitor and a rebel against your God. No,

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<sup>26</sup> *Abandon*, 2<sup>e</sup> P., I, vi; *Lettre*, 24.



I should prefer to correct it reasonably and with compassion, like this: Cheer up, now, poor heart of mine! See! We have fallen into the pit which we had so firmly resolved to avoid. Well, let us rise again and quit this place for ever. Let us implore the mercy of God, let us hope that it will help us to be stronger for the future, and let us humbly resume our road. Courage! We must be henceforth more vigilant, and God will assist us. And on this reprehension I would establish a solid and firm resolution never again to commit that fault, and to employ the requisite means for carrying out my resolution.' " 27

De Caussade, on his side, counsels us to offer unceasingly this interior prayer to God: "O Lord, preserve me, I beseech Thee, from all sin, especially of this or that kind. But as for the pain which serves to cure my inordinate self-love, the humiliation and confusion, which wound and should crush my self-esteem, I accept these for as long as Thou wilt, and I thank Thee for them as for a signal favour. Grant, O Lord, that these bitter remedies may produce their effect, that they may cure my pride, and help me to acquire true humility, which is the solid foundation of the interior life and of all perfection." 28

In spite of prayer and our best efforts, new faults will infallibly be committed. The one remedy is to humble ourselves always more profoundly, to return to God with the same confidence, and to resume the fight without ever yielding to discouragement. "If we once learn to humble ourselves sincerely for our least faults and to rise again promptly with confidence in God, tranquillity and meekness: that will be an assured remedy for the past, a powerful support and an efficacious preservative for the future. But holy abandonment, rightly understood, should set us free from that impatience which makes us desire to reach the summit of sanctity at a bound, and only succeeds in removing us further from it. The only way thereto is the way of humility; impatience is one of

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*, 2<sup>e</sup> P., I, iii; *Lettre*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Vie*, I, v.

the forms of pride. Let us apply ourselves with all our power to the correction of our shortcomings; but let us resign ourselves to the fact that we shall not succeed in extirpating them all in a single day. Let us ask of God in fervent and persevering prayer, and with the most filial confidence, to grant us the decisive grace that will withdraw us completely from ourselves to make us live henceforward solely in Him; but let us leave it to Him, with an abandonment equally filial, to determine the day and the hour when this grace shall be given us " <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Id., ibid., Lettre, 19.*

## CHAPTER IX

ON ABANDONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL VARIETIES OF THE COMMON WAY—(*continued*). INTERIOR TRIALS IN GENERAL

WE have already considered temporal goods and evils, the essentials of the spiritual life, and its more external manifestations. Our next task is to study the pains proper to the interior life, at first in a general way, then some of them in particular: such as temptations, aridities, obscurities, etc. It is here, especially, that we shall have occasion to practise abandonment. For such trials are inevitable and very frequent. According to St. Alphonsus, "they are the bitterest of all possible pains."<sup>1</sup>

"One day is never exactly like another," says St. Francis de Sales. "This day is cloudy, the next is rainy, the next comes dry, and the following windy. It is the same with men. Human life glides along as a river, fluctuating and undulating in a perpetual diversity of movements, now elevating itself with hope, anon sinking through fear; here turning to the right in consolation, there bending to the-left in affliction. It never continues in the same state. . . . We should like to encounter no difficulties, no contradictions, no afflictions, but always to enjoy consolations without aridities, repose without labour, peace without trouble. Who does not recognise how great a folly this is? It is to desire the impossible. Such uniformity of state can be found only in paradise and in hell: in paradise, good, repose, consolation without any admixture of evil, trouble or affliction; in hell, evil, despair, trouble, and unrest, without any admixture of good, hope, tranquillity or peace. But in this perishable life, the good is never found entirely separated from evil, or repose without labour, or consolation without affliction."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Am. de J.C.*, c. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> *Vie dévote*, 4<sup>e</sup> P., c. xiii.

The interior life is subject to the same general law. Vicissitudes and trials are there inevitable. Our own misery and the demon's malice may be immediately responsible for them, but their primary cause is always God. When they originate from ourselves, they are due to ignorance of mind, or impressionability of heart, to disorder of our imagination, or perversity of our natural desires, etc. But is it not by God's design we have been born children of Adam? And is it not by His will we have these infirmities to support in order to secure our sanctification? Can the demon do anything against us without the divine permission? King Saul was attacked by temptations of jealousy and hatred against David; and the Holy Scripture tells us that "an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him" (I *Kings*, xvi, 14). But if this spirit came from the Lord, how could it be evil? If evil, how could it have come from the Lord? It is evil by the bad intention it has to afflict men in order to ruin them; and it is from the Lord, because He has permitted it to afflict men for the purpose of saving them. Very often the Lord tries souls by His own direct action, which He diversifies according to their strength and requirements, and the designs He has conceived with regard to them. The Venerable Louis de Blois describes in vivid language "the admirable conduct of the heavenly Spouse towards a soul consecrated to Him. In the beginning, when the bonds of betrothal have scarcely been formed, He visits, fortifies, illumines her, and wins her heart by making her experience nothing but delight in her service. He binds her securely to Him by the sweetness of His attractions. He manifests Himself to her continually in order to hold her by the charms of His presence. In a word, with the object of supporting her weakness, He allows her to taste only joy and consolation. Later on, however, He will no longer feed her with the milk of babes, but will nourish her instead with the solid food of affliction. He will open her eyes and make her see how much suffering awaits her in the future. And behold! heaven, earth and

hell now conspire against her. Enemies without and temptations within; outside, tribulations and darkness, and aridity and desolation in the centre of her heart: all contribute to her martyrdom. The Spouse disappears from her gaze; He returns after a time, but only to abandon her again. Now He leaves her amidst the darkness and horrors of death; and now He recalls her to the light of life, so that she may realise the truth of the oracle: It is He that bringeth us down to the tomb and leadeth us back again.”<sup>3</sup>

How explain this conduct on the part of Divine Providence? It is because there are really two people in each of us. “Divine love and self-love live in our hearts, as Jacob and Esau in the womb of Rebecca. These two are irreconcilably opposed to each other, and are always in conflict. ‘Thou hast two nations in thy womb,’ said the Lord to Rebecca, ‘and two peoples shall be divided out of thy womb, and one people shall overcome the other, and the elder shall serve the younger’ (*Gen.*, xxv, 23). The soul similarly has two loves in her heart, and consequently two distinct colonies of movements, affections and passions. And just as Rebecca’s two infants, by the contrariety of their movements, caused their mother painful convulsions, so the two loves in the soul keep our hearts in a state of trouble and unrest. But it is necessary, here also, that the elder shall serve the younger, that is to say, that sensual love shall be subjected to the love of God.”<sup>4</sup>

Self-love manifests itself by the horror of suffering, the seeking after enjoyment, and particularly by pride. Hence arises that intestine war of which the Apostle complains, a war that is always fierce and persistent, but more violent in the case of certain persons, or with regard to certain objects, or at certain ages, certain times, or on certain occasions. Even in those who have made some progress in spirituality there is usually a hidden fund of self-love,

<sup>3</sup> *Spec. relig.*, c. vi.

<sup>4</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, I, xi, c. xx.

a delicate, almost imperceptible pride, whence issue a swarm of imperfections of which they are hardly conscious : vain self-complacencies, vain fears, vain desires, conceited manners, suspicions and criticisms of others, an entire world of miseries, weaknesses, and peccadilloes. What, then, is the remedy? Assuredly, Christian mortification. To this, therefore, we must devote ourselves, and we must practise it with perseverance and method, relying on the assistance of grace. But sometimes we shall not have sufficient light, and sometimes our courage will fail us; and we shall never completely vanquish this almost invisible foe, which forms a part of ourselves, unless God comes to our aid by the action of His Providence.

He has two ways of doing this : the way of sweetness and the way of holy severity. When a soul begins to give herself to Him, He favours her with an abundance of sensible consolations, in order to draw her to Himself and to wean her away from worldly pleasures. She detaches herself little by little from creatures and clings to God, but in an imperfect manner. For it is the common failing of such unformed souls to seek their own satisfaction in everything they do. And divine consolations are precisely the most delicate nourishment both of pride and of spiritual gluttony. By the subtle artifices of self-love, we appropriate the gifts of God; we are happy to be in this or that state; and instead of thanking therefor God's infinite mercy, we attribute our happiness to our own merit, at least in the secret sentiments of our hearts. Therefore, in order to complete the destruction of self-love, God Himself must deal it many a hard blow through interior trials. These blows will be painful, indeed, but infallibly effective.

In this way, God humbles and instructs us. Jealous of His glory, to prevent our hearts from stealing it, He conceals from our eyes nearly all His graces and favours. To this rule there are only two exceptions : beginners, who require to be drawn and held by sensible and per-

ceptible gifts; and the perfect, who, having been purified of self-love by a thousand interior trials, can now be safely trusted with the sight of God's graces in their souls without the least danger of self-complacency. Generally, He hides so well from souls the virtues and graces where-with He endows them, that they can see neither their humility, nor their patience, nor their progress, nor their charity. Hence they are sometimes almost unable to refrain from weeping over the supposed loss of these virtues and over their lack of generosity in suffering. At the same time, they are made to realise the profound abyss of corruption we have within us, which heretofore they had neither the power nor the wish to fathom. Now they have to contemplate it at their leisure, not by the light of glorifying illuminations, but by bitter experiences a thousand times renewed. There can be nothing so fatal to self-love as this most afflicting and humiliating spectacle. To be conscious of our weakness at every instant, and to find ourselves standing on the brink of the precipice: is not this a trial eminently well calculated to bring us to an absolute distrust of self and an absolute confidence in God alone? If it is good for us to be confounded before others, it is also and equally good for us to be annihilated in our own estimation. It is experiences of the latter kind, especially, that will gradually cause the death of pride in us. And here we have the reason why God permits us to endure so many interior humiliations. The instruction they give us they make dazzlingly clear. And they continue it so long that we learn it well, so well, indeed, that it can never be forgotten. It only remains for us to profit by it to establish ourselves in true humility which is gentle and peaceful, and which will drive out from our hearts the bitterness and vexation of false humility. Bitterness and vexation at what humbles us are simply the workings of pride, just as bitterness and vexation at what hurts us are the fruits of impatience.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> De Caussade, *op. cit.*, 2<sup>e</sup> P., iv, 4-22; vi, 17; vii, 14.

By means of these interior trials God completes our detachment. Self-love is a many-headed hydra, and all its heads have to be cut off one by one. First, we had to sacrifice our attachment to the world, to earthly goods, to the pleasures of sense, to health, etc. And to assist us in our task, God mingled a wholesome bitterness with our worldly joys, wounded us in the persons and objects that were dear to us, and abandoned our bodies to different infirmities. By faithful co-operation with His action, we have already achieved considerable progress. But self-love, beaten on one ground, awaits us on another and more delicate. It seizes on what is sensible in piety. And this attachment is the more to be feared for that it is less gross, and apparently even quite lawful. Nevertheless, perfect love cannot suffer even an attachment to spiritual consolations to divide our hearts with God. What, then, is going to happen? If there is question of souls that are less privileged, for whom God does not entertain a particularly jealous tenderness, He will just leave them in the undisturbed enjoyment of these holy sweetnesses, and content Himself with the sacrifice they have made of the pleasures of sense. This is the ordinary state of devout persons, whose piety contains an admixture of self-seeking. God, undoubtedly, does not approve of their failings; but as He bestows on them less grace, He does not expect from them very high perfection. He has loftier designs with regard to other more privileged souls, and is consequently with them more exacting. The jealousy of His love is as great as its tenderness. As He desires to give Himself absolutely to those chosen ones, so does He desire to possess their hearts wholly, without the least reserve or division. He cannot, therefore, be satisfied with the exterior crosses and afflictions which would suffice to detach them from creatures. He wills to detach them even from themselves, and to destroy in them the last roots of that self-love which fastens on the sentiment of devotion, and finds therein its support, its nourishment, and its enjoyment. In order to bring about



this second death, He withdraws every consolation, every sweetness, every sense of support; and He tries the soul by aridities, repugnances, insensibilities and other afflictions, until she finds herself in a state of annihilation, so to speak.

The action of God has not always the same degree of intensity. He increases or diminishes it according to the designs of His love, and according to the strength and generosity of different souls. If He does not judge it well to treat them all with a constant holy severity, at least He makes them pass through alternate seasons of consolation and desolation, peace and combat, light and obscurity. By means of such continual vicissitudes, He renders them pliable and docile to all His motions. For, owing to repeated changes in her interior state, the soul finally loses her attachment to every condition and is ready to welcome all at the will of the Holy Spirit Who breathes where He pleases and as it pleases Him.

In short, by means of all these trials, says the venerable Louis de Blois, "God purifies, humbles, instructs our souls and renders them pliable to His will; everything defective, everything deformed, everything disagreeable to His sight, He removes from them, and at the same time embellishes them with all the ornaments which can make them pleasing in His eyes. And when He finds them faithful, full of patience and good-will; when the long endurance of tribulations has brought them, with the assistance of His grace, to such a degree of perfection that they suffer with tranquillity and joy all manner of temptations and afflictions: then He unites them most intimately to Himself, confides to them His secrets and His mysteries, and communicates Himself to them without reserve." <sup>6</sup>

These are the days of pure love, since therein we serve God exclusively for His own sake and at our own expense. Ah! how hard it is to love Him purely in seasons of consolation, with no subtle self-seeking, no vain com-

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<sup>6</sup> *Spec. relig.*, c. vi.

placency ! But in times of affliction and interior privation, properly accepted, we have no longer to fear that self-love will insinuate itself into our relations with God, because in these relations it can find nothing but bitterness. Oh, how well qualified is this assurance to console him who understands the value of pure love ! We have here the reason why some of the saints preferred privations and sufferings to consolations and enjoyments, why they loved the former so passionately and could scarcely support the latter.

It is during the period of interior trials that we can gather the richest harvest for heaven, because it is only then we are capable of good works that are absolutely pure and disinterested. "In the time of consolation," says St. Alphonsus, "we do not need great virtue to renounce sensual pleasures, or to endure injuries and adversities. A soul thus favoured can suffer everything. But often her patience comes rather from the consolations which delight her than from the strength of her love for God." <sup>7</sup> On the contrary, it is an evident proof of high virtue, to be able to endure patiently the keen sense of our own miseries, weaknesses, humours, caprices, and all the other trials which Providence employs for our purification. When these interior afflictions have thoroughly detached and purified the soul, she easily ascends to perfect abandonment, to a filial confidence in God alone. In other words, the loftiest virtues have become in a sense natural to her. And, on this head, what spiritual riches have not their miseries and trials brought the saints, by furnishing the material for their interior combats, for their victories, and for the triumph of grace ! On the other hand, it is only when we have been completely emptied of ourselves that we arrive at the state in which we no longer think of anything but God, relish anything but God, seek support in anything but God, rejoice in anything but God. Here now is the new life in Jesus Christ, the building up of the new man after the destruction of the old. Let us, then,

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<sup>7</sup> *Am. env.*, c. xiii.

each of us, make haste to die, like the silkworm, so as to become a beautiful butterfly and live henceforth in the pure light and air of heaven, instead of ignobly creeping on the earth.

But self-love is not easy to kill, and only dies after a long and terrible agony. The soul that is still imperfect resembles green wood which perspires and groans, suffers contortions and convulsions, before taking fire. Or we may liken her to a statue under the sculptor's chisel, or to a stone which the mason is hammering into shape. Temptations, aridities, and other trials deal us hard and cruel blows. But without them, we should remain like the unformed block, we could never acquire a resemblance to Jesus, suffering, humiliated, crucified. It is only by multiplied despoliations we can attain to perfect love; and the more we desire to advance in the ways of prayer, in union with God, and true sanctity, the more necessary for us is emancipation and detachment from all affection to creatures. We should cherish the consolations of God as much as the God of consolations, if we had not been taught to serve Him in the most terrible abandonment. In a word, He deprives us of His sweetness, not necessarily to punish our faults, but because He loves us. Possibly, we shall enjoy less consolation in religion than in the world. For God purifies with more unsparing rigour those whom He destines for more intimate union with Himself.

The chalice, no doubt, is bitter, but not so bitter as hell. God shows us great mercy by substituting the comparatively mild purgatory of the present life for the more terrible one ahead. Besides, since, whether we like it or not, we have to drink this salutary cup, let us make a virtue of necessity: it is the only way to sweeten its bitterness. Everything will become easier to us according as affliction has purified and detached us. Indeed, when our detachment is perfect, we shall scarcely feel any suffering at all, except by God's appointment, except also in moments of fatigue or particularly grave

trials. For keen suffering is mainly due to the strong opposition set up by self-love, which refuses to die or to abdicate. Divine love would scarcely produce any but sweet and delightful feelings in our hearts, if it there found nothing to resist it. But after all, would it be proper to desire a heaven here upon earth, and a path strewn with roses, whilst we see our adorable Master burdened with His cross and falling in agony? Heaven is well worth all the sacrifices demanded of us. Besides, fervent souls have not by any means the monopoly of suffering. Their afflictions are lightened by love and hope; and, taken all in all, it costs less to run after sanctity than to languish in tepidity under the crushing weight of unmortified passions.

This being so, we must be careful to put no obstacle to the divine favours. But should it please God to deprive us of those sunny days when we experienced such sensible sweetness in prayer and at Communion, when our relations with our Well-Beloved were full of charm and delight: let us not lament the loss. God has withdrawn His favours without any fault on our side. Consequently, they have done their work, and would be of no further use to us. Oh, how much more precious are the martyrdom and the agony of the present time! If we only knew how to accept, esteem, and love this happy interior desolation, we should desire to feel it always, to live in it always, because we should thus live closer to God.

Many of the saints, urged by a special inspiration, have said to God in their sufferings: "More, O Lord, still more!" According to De Caussade, it is often presumption and a dangerous illusion to desire to follow such an example. He considers that we are too small spiritually and too feeble to mount so high, unless we have moral certitude that this is God's will for us. He never desired, still less solicited, such tribulations and afflictions for himself. He forbade one of his disciples to pray for more or fewer of them than Providence provides. God, he says, knows better than we do the exact measure necessary for us; the sufferings which He sends us are

sufficient, and there is no need that we should either wish or procure any more for ourselves. Let us rather wait for and prepare for sufferings: that is the surest means of having the strength and courage to accept them when they come.

We must also arm ourselves with patience and humility. If we have a somewhat intractable disposition, and if God sends us more afflicting trials to tame it, the violence and persistence of the combat will not injure the soul that fights with the resolution of never losing courage. True, the ferocity of the attacks will add to the fatigue and the peril; but with God's help it will also add to the glory of the victories and bring an increase of sanctity, merit, and reward.

Whilst the heavenly Physician freely uses the lancet on us and plies us with bitter potions, let us contemplate ourselves, not in the distorting mirror of self-love, but in the faithful mirror of truth. And let us never lose sight of our miseries. Then we shall humble ourselves, almost naturally, under the mighty hand of God; and instead of finding fault with His justice and His love, we shall realise that He has done us a wonderful favour, and that even in His severity He is our most merciful Father still.

Above all, we must establish ourselves in a holy indifference. "Whether the ship floats in the trough or on the swell, whether she sails to south or to north, in whatever direction the wind wafts her, never does the needle cease to point towards the pole and the guiding star. In the same way, although everything within and around us should be turned upside down, whether our souls be in sadness or in joy, in sweetness or in bitterness, in peace or in trouble, in light or in darkness, in temptation or in repose, in appetite or disgust, in aridity or in tenderness, whether the sun parches them or the dew refreshes them, it is necessary, nevertheless, that the fine point of our spirits, of our hearts, of our superior wills, which is the compass of the soul, should look incessantly and tend perpetually towards the love of God." <sup>8</sup> The inferior

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<sup>8</sup> St. Francis de Sales, *Vie dévote*, 4<sup>e</sup> P., c. xiii.

part of our soul may be in trouble and agitation; but the will must remain always peaceful in the midst of the storm, keeping itself turned to God and seeking only Him. And never should we allow anything to separate us from His love, whether it be tribulation, or anguish, or present affliction, or fear of evils to come. To love God and to do His holy will: is not this the only essential thing and even our ultimate end? Everything besides is but a way leading to this, consolations as well as aridities, peace as well as war, light as well as darkness. Which way will be the best for us? We cannot tell. But God knows, and He loves us tenderly. Let us therefore permit Him to dispose of us according to His beneficent designs. Our happiness is a thousand times safer in His hands than it would be in our own. In any case, He will not give us the choice: He remains always Sovereign Master. Let us, then, second His action with willing hearts. It is from Him our trials come, and He will sustain us in the ordeal. The saints had a preference for suffering, because we profit more by patient endurance than by action. And let us remember that holy abandonment is the shortest and surest road to sanctity.

Alvarez offered to God this admirable prayer: "Dispose of me, I entreat Thee, according to Thy good-pleasure; it is all I desire. I ask of Thee no other faith, no other means, neither more favours, nor less sufferings. I only want to remain in the state wherein Thou hast put me and to be treated as I have deserved. I shall be satisfied with whatever consolations Thou art pleased to grant me, and I shall not complain of the desolations Thou mayest send me. Fulfil Thy designs regarding me with perfect liberty. It is only thus my heart can find the peace which it longs for." \*

When sufferings assail us with cruelty and persistence, let us abandon ourselves unreservedly to Him by Whom perhaps we believe ourselves abandoned, and let us say courageously: "Thou willest these afflictions, O Lord,

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\* Du Pont, *op. cit.*, c. l.

and I also will them; I will them as Thou wilt them, and for so long as Thou mayest will them." During such times, the best thing we can do is to keep repeating our *fiat*, gently and without effort, at prayer, in choir, at Mass and Holy Communion; and often throughout the day, as St. Francis de Sales recommends, we should make short acts of acquiescence, as: "May Thy will be done, O heavenly Father; may Thy will be done, now and forever," and so try to maintain ourselves in a habitual disposition of complete abandonment. Here is a short and very simple practice, and yet nothing more is necessary for the acquisition of that perfection which perhaps we often go far afield in search of. The mere *fiat*, repeated in all our exterior and interior tribulations, will suffice to bring us to the perfection of sanctity.

Certainly, we have a right to ask God to alleviate our sufferings or to remove them. But we are not obliged to do so. We should rather implore Him to increase our patience, for that will contribute better to His glory and to our profit. St. Alphonsus teaches us to say: "Lord, I am completely at Thy disposal. If Thou wilt that I should remain all my life in desolation and affliction: give me only Thy grace and Thy love, then do with me whatever pleases Thee best."<sup>10</sup> Let us at least shun the agitation and over-eagerness which manifest an inordinate desire. Let us suffer in peace without begging consolation from creatures. To avoid indulging in self-pity, we should speak of our sufferings as little as possible, nor should we allow them to occupy too much of our thoughts. But let us seek counsel and encouragement from a man of God. Above all, let us have recourse to prayer, in order to obtain the strength to accept our cross, keeping our eyes fixed affectionately on our well-beloved Jesus, Who hath loved us and delivered Himself for us. For now, if ever, it is necessary to persevere in prayer, to invoke the aid of the Lord, and to rely on Him alone.

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<sup>10</sup> *Am. env.*, c. xiii.

## CHAPTER X

ON ABANDONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL VARIETIES OF THE  
COMMON WAY—(*continued*). TEMPTATIONS

“**F**OR a soul that loves Jesus Christ,” says St. Alphonsus, “temptations are the greatest of all trials. Other trials, when accepted with resignation, help her to unite herself more intimately to God. But temptations expose her to the danger of losing Jesus Christ, and are consequently the cruellest afflictions that can befall her.”<sup>1</sup>

Not all temptations come from the demon. “Everyone is tempted by his own concupiscence, which draws and seduces him” (*James*, i, 14), and this evil fire is fanned into flame by the scandals of the perverse and imperfect. The majority of men expose themselves to peril of their own free choice, or they precipitate one another into it. The demon has little more to do than to fold his arms and watch them performing his bad work for him; but he labours unceasingly for the ruin of souls that belong to him no longer. Thus, one of the fathers of the desert saw Satan tranquilly seated at the gate of Alexandria, whilst whole legions of his satellites were fiercely assaulting the hermits in their solitude.

“The demon attacks us in different ways,” writes the Venerable Louis de Blois. “Sometimes he comes to us secretly, pretending no harm, or even under the specious appearance of piety, in order the more surely to entangle us in his snares. At other times he sets upon us with open violence in the hope of overpowering our resistance by the energy of his attack, or at least by the numberless blows he showers upon us. Sometimes, again, he makes

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<sup>1</sup> *Am. env.*, c. xiii.



his approach in the gliding, imperceptible manner of the serpent, endeavouring to lead us into grave faults through the contempt of little ones, or to a false and obdurate conscience through the ignoring of certain feelings of remorse or certain doubts. And there are occasions when, dispensing with disguise and diplomacy, he presents himself before us in all his ugliness, and suddenly proposes the perpetration of some most heinous crime. On still other occasions, he will try to use our spiritual consolations to fill us with pride, and our interior pains to discourage us; our temporal prosperity to foster a love of ease, and our temporal adversity to drive us to despair. . . . How shall I describe the assaults made upon you by the spirits of evil? Like the never-ceasing billows of a raging sea, they beat constantly on your hearts with violent impact, so that at every instant you believe yourselves on the point of shipwreck. Perhaps the temptation will be so horrible that the thoughts it suggests will appear to you such as could only enter the minds of the already damned. You will think that the whole of hell has conspired against you, that the Lord in His anger has delivered you over to Satan. Often you will even lack the power to open your lips in prayer, or to sing the praises of God. These attacks, so afflicting in themselves, become doubly so through their long continuance and their frequent renewals. For the demon will not be satisfied with a single assault, or with several. Plunged and plunged again into this furnace, you will pass your days in affliction, constantly oppressed with sufferings, now more, now somewhat less terrible, but always cruel.”<sup>2</sup> St. Francis de Sales, after citing two memorable examples, makes this encouraging remark: “Such terrific assaults, such mighty temptations God never permits except in the case of souls whom He designs to elevate to a particularly pure and excellent love.”<sup>3</sup> Besides, on condition that we watch and pray, He will be always in the boat with us. He

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, c. vi.

<sup>3</sup> *Vie dévote*, P. iv, cc. iv-v.

may seem to slumber, but the tempest has broken only by His permission, and at one word from Him will again subside.

Temptation launches its fiercest attacks upon us sometimes at the beginning, sometimes during the progress, and sometimes towards the consummation of the spiritual life. Under certain circumstances, it may have a decisive influence, for example, when the particular object of attack is our faith or our vocation. We may have to endure very special and extraordinary trials, such as temptations to blasphemy, or to hatred of God, or persistent doubts against the articles of our belief. The character of the persons we meet, the office entrusted to us, the most casual circumstance can be the occasion of temptations. But they will have their principal root in our own temperament and character, and in the weak points of our own souls, viz., our predominant failings. And since the whole man consists of body and soul, so that he is at the same time an angel and a beast, we shall have particularly to combat the passions of pride and sensuality, for these are our most dangerous and inveterate enemies.

Even the holiest persons have had to support these painful combats. To confine ourselves to temptations against the angelic virtue, some of the saints were entirely exempt from these; for instance, St. Teresa the Elder, St. Rose of Lima, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Others suffered the humiliation of them only in a passing way: St. Madeleine de Pazzi during nine days, St. Margaret-Mary for a few hours. Several, after one decisive victory, were thenceforward preserved altogether from them, as our holy father, St. Benedict and St. Thomas Aquinas. But a very large number had to bear with the bitterness of this most afflicting trial during long years, or even to the end of their lives. The Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Frances of Rome, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Benedict Labre, and so many others, were cruelly buffeted by this angel of Satan. In the case of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, the temptation lasted seven

years, St. Mary of Egypt suffered from it seventeen years, and the Venerable Caesar de Bus twenty-five years. It attacked with terrible violence, and during the space of more than twelve months, the illustrious St. Alphonsus de' Liguori, an angel in innocence, when he was in the eighty-eighth year of his age. The Blessed Angela of Foligno moves us to compassion when she tells the story of her trials. But there will be many other temptations, sometimes very unexpected ones. The lives of the saints furnish examples in abundance.

With regard to ourselves, when may we expect our principal trials? At the beginning, or in the middle, or at the end of our course? Perhaps we shall be kept constantly in the crucible? On what side shall we have to sustain the fiercest onslaught? What shall be its intensity and duration? God alone can fully answer these questions; but we can guess the answer to some of them ourselves. The powers of hell are a pack of furious dogs that would tear us to pieces. Each of them, however, has a chain to its neck, and God leads them about as He pleases. Against His good-pleasure, they are powerlessness itself. He allows them no liberty to tempt, or He leaves them some latitude, more or less, as He judges fit, with regard to what persons He pleases, in the manner and for the time that He considers best. So the choice of the temptation, the time, the degree of its violence, and the period of its duration: all are in the hands of God, our Father, our Saviour, our Sanctifier. This surely ought to encourage us. With the assistance of grace, we can prevent many temptations, we can repel the fiercest attacks of the enemy, and we can never fall save by our own full and free consent. The demon may bark at us, threaten us, entice us; but he can only bite those that want to be bitten. But, alas! we have in our free will the awful power of yielding in spite of grace, of neglecting to solicit the help of grace, and even of exposing ourselves to temptation. And this is what should keep us in perpetual self-distrust. In last analysis, therefore, the danger

lies in ourselves. We are ourselves the enemy we have most cause to fear.

There is here a combination of God's good-pleasure and His signified will. This latter requires of us to "watch and pray that we enter not into temptation." That is to say, we must prevent temptation so far as it depends upon us, or by petition obtain the grace to resist it. But when temptation comes, in spite of our watching and praying, the signified will demands further that we combat it like valiant soldiers of Jesus Christ. The means to be employed are known to everybody. But, according to St. Alphonsus, "the most efficacious and the most necessary of all means is to invoke the help of God, and to continue praying for as long as the temptation lasts. The Lord often grants victory, not to the first petition, but to the second, the third, or the fourth. We must convince ourselves, in short, that all our good depends upon prayer. On prayer depends the change of life, on prayer depends the triumph over temptations, on prayer depends the grace of divine love, of perfection, of perseverance, of eternal salvation. Experience proves this. He who has recourse to God in temptation triumphs, he who has not, suffers defeat: particularly in temptations to incontinence." <sup>4</sup>

But whilst watching, praying, and combating, we must accept the necessity of having to fight, because such is the good-pleasure of God. "I would have you know," says our holy father, St. Bernard, "that no one can live free from temptation. When one temptation disappears, you may look with assurance for another. Why do I say 'with assurance'? Rather must it be with fear. You should pray to be delivered from them, but never promise yourselves complete repose and perfect liberty whilst you live 'in this body of death.' Consider, however, with what goodness God treats us: He allows us to be frequently attacked by certain temptations, in order that we may escape others more dangerous; He delivers us

<sup>4</sup> *Am. env.*, c. xiii.

promptly from some, so that we may be tried by others which He knows to be more useful for us.”<sup>5</sup>

We should place all our confidence in God. Whatever may be the immediate cause of the temptations, “is it not always He Who permits them for our good? And should we not adore His holy permissions in everything, apart from the formal sin which He detests and which we should likewise detest?”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as the Venerable Louis de Blois says: “You should consider that your temptations, in God’s merciful design, are but trials well calculated to make your love for Him appear to best advantage, lessons to teach you compassion for those who, like yourself, are a target for the shafts of the enemy, means to expiate your past sins and to prevent fresh faults in the future, a pledge of more abundant graces; lastly, a remedy against pride, because they bring home to you the truth that without the grace of God you can do nothing.”<sup>7</sup>

What a lesson in humility! “When a soul,” writes St. Alphonsus, “has been favoured by God with interior consolations, she easily believes herself capable of repulsing every attack of her enemies, and of carrying through to a successful issue every enterprise which concerns His glory. But when strongly tempted, when she sees herself on the brink of the precipice, on the point of succumbing, ah! then she realises her misery, and her powerlessness to resist unless God comes to her aid.”<sup>8</sup> Brilliant lights on the excellence of humility would possibly result in swelling her with pride. But temptation gives her a full and vivid consciousness of her misery. Perhaps she has been intoxicated with heavenly gifts and favours: temptation will prevent her from lifting herself aloft, or will force her down again even to the bottom of her nothingness. Some of the saints would have been lost through pride had not Providence furnished them with

<sup>5</sup> *Serm. V. in Ps. xc.*

<sup>6</sup> De Caussade, *op. cit.*, P. II, vi, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Blossius, *Spec. relig.*, c. vi.

<sup>8</sup> *Am. env.*, c. xiii.

the antidote of temptation. God buried them in an abyss of humiliations in order to exalt them to the summit of sanctity. Thus, the great Apostle, after being rapt up into the third heaven, was buffeted by an angel of Satan. St. Catherine of Sienna after intimate communings with Our Lord, and St. Joseph of Cupertino after astonishing ecstasies, felt the cruel and humiliating sting of the flesh. St. Alphonsus, that incomparable teacher, was more tormented with scruples than the least of his disciples.

“It is necessary,” says our holy father, St. Bernard, “that temptations come, for we cannot lawfully claim the crown unless we have been exposed to the combat.”<sup>9</sup> In peace-times we are disposed to relax our efforts, but on the field of battle we must either conquer or die. To escape utter ruin, we have to apply ourselves to vigilance, to prayer, to obedience and mortification, and to do a hundred times more than when out of danger. The demon attacks us from hatred, but he really helps us by stimulating our zeal and obliging us to hasten our steps. So, despite his malice, he becomes a very important contributor to our spiritual advancement. This explains, says St. Alphonsus, why God often permits the souls most dear to Him to be tried by temptation:<sup>10</sup> because thus they would acquire more merits on earth and a greater degree of glory in heaven. Seeing themselves assaulted by so many enemies, they become detached from the present life, and sigh eagerly for death in order to fly to God and to be no longer exposed to the danger of losing Him. When, therefore, we have to support temptation, provided we do our duty, instead of fearing that we are in disfavour with God, we ought rather to believe ourselves specially beloved by Him.

Nor should we be troubled or unduly fearful because the temptation is frequent and violent. “If the Lord is almighty, and if the demons are but His slaves: why should I fear to combat, with the assistance of His grace,

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<sup>9</sup> *Serm. V. in Quadr.*

<sup>10</sup> *Loc. cit.*

all the powers of hell? Taking the crucifix in my hand, I should feel that with it as my only weapon I could conquer single-handed and easily the whole army of demons. Sometimes they have appeared to me, and I have been hardly in any degree afraid of them. They, on the contrary, seemed to be struck with terror at the sight of me. In fact, I have found them to be great cowards. When they see themselves despised, all their courage evaporates. But if we voluntarily give them a hold on us by attachment to honours, to riches, or to pleasures, they conspire with us against ourselves, and we put arms into their hands to be employed for our destruction. Such blindness cannot be sufficiently deplored. One venial sin can do us more harm than all the powers of hell combined." <sup>11</sup> So speaks St. Teresa the Elder. The pious Bishop of Geneva addressed St. Jane de Chantal in very similar terms: "So your temptations against the faith have come back, and are tormenting you. What I have to say is this: You think too much about them, you are too much afraid of them, too apprehensive of the evil that may result from them. You are unduly sensitive to the temptations. You love the faith, and would wish that not a single thought against it could occur to your mind. It seems to you that everything injures it. Nonsense! You shouldn't mistake the rustling of the leaves for the rattling of arms. Our enemy is a mighty blusterer. But don't let him frighten you. He has raised many an uproar and many a tumult around the saints; but for all that, you see how they now occupy the place which he, miserable one, has lost forever. Let us pay no heed, then, to his fanfares, for he can do us no harm. That is why he wishes at least to terrify us, and by this terror to disturb our peace, and by this disturbance to weary us, and by this weariness to make us give up. Let us have no fear but of God, and even of Him only a loving fear. Let us keep the gates securely closed, and

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<sup>11</sup> *Vie*, c. xxv.

the walls of our resolutions in good repair, and then let us live in peace.”<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, temptation is a horrible thing; it makes an impression on you; you actually feel an inclination for the evil suggested. No matter. The impression is only a sentiment. It humbles you, but it does not make you guilty. To be sensible of evil is not to consent to it. All that happens in the inferior part of the soul: imaginations, memories, feelings, irregular motions, etc.: all that is *in* us, but not *from* us. Of itself, it is indeliberate and involuntary. It can only become sin by our free consent. As for the inclination we feel towards evil, that is but an infirmity of our fallen nature, not a disorder of the will. Vicious pleasure solicits to evil and constitutes a danger. But it is not imputable to us unless the will freely entertains or accepts it. However strong may be the suggestions of the demon, in whatever form appear the phantoms that flit through the imagination, so long as your will rejects them, instead of soiling your soul, they rather make it more pure and more pleasing to God. You experience a profound interior affliction in the temptations to impurity, hatred, aversion, and such-like. The fear of having succumbed to them disturbs and distresses you. That is an evident sign that you have a great fear of God, a horror of sin, and the will to resist. Now, it is morally impossible for a soul in such dispositions to change suddenly so far as to give a full and entire consent to mortal sin without being clearly aware of it. At most, it may happen that, considering the force and frequency of the temptation, there has been some little negligence, a moment of surprise, for instance, a half-formed desire of vengeance, semi-voluntary feelings of complacency. But as for full, entire, and deliberate consent, that is impossible with such a disposition of soul. Or at least the passage from a sovereign hatred of mortal sin to a full and free acceptance of it would be easily observed.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Lettres*, 397, 400, 427.

<sup>13</sup> De Caussade, *op. cit.*, II, vi, 3-5.



We must not, however, desire temptations, in spite of the great advantages to be drawn from them; for they are actual incitements to evil and consequently a danger to our souls. Rather we must implore of God to preserve us from them, particularly from those to which He foresees we should succumb. Nevertheless, as we have already remarked, we should be resigned to endure temptation, if such be God's good-pleasure; but at the same time we should be resolved to do all that is required by His signified will to prevent or to overcome it. Then, without ever losing courage, we should put our trust in God, abandon ourselves to His sweet Providence, and fear nothing. Let us pray, let us struggle; and, since it is He Who exposes us to the combat, He will never forsake us or permit us to fall.

Assuredly, holy abandonment does not forbid a moderate desire to be delivered from these perilous trials; it only excludes uneasiness and desires that are excessive. "With regard to your old temptations," wrote her wise director to St. Jane de Chantal, "don't be over-anxious to be set free from them, nor allow yourself to be terrified by their attacks. With God's help, you will soon obtain deliverance. I shall pray to Him for that, but rest assured it shall be with full resignation to His good-pleasure: I mean, gentle and cheerful resignation. You desire most ardently that God would leave you in peace in this respect, whereas it is my desire that God Himself should be left in peace in all respects: that none of our desires should be in opposition to His. I would not have you desire by voluntary act such a peace as would be unprofitable and possibly prejudicial. I wish you would not torment yourself with such desires, or with any others. Our Lord will give us His peace when we have humbly resigned ourselves to live meekly in a state of war. Be of good courage. Our Lord will help us, and we shall love Him dearly." <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Lettre*, 428.

## CHAPTER XI

ON ABANDONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL VARIETIES OF THE COMMON WAY—(*continued*). CONSOLATIONS AND ARIDITIES

**A**T one time God is prodigal of His sensible consolations and spiritual sweetnesses; at another He bestows them with less abundance; then He withdraws them altogether, and the poor soul finds herself empty. The feelings become cold, the imagination giddy, the understanding dull and inactive; and often weariness and disgust overpower the will. The saints themselves experienced these painful vicissitudes. Our holy father, St. Bernard, gives expression to his feelings in the following well-known passage: "How is my heart become as earth without water? So hard has it grown that I can no longer extract from it any tears of compunction. Psalmody, pious reading, and prayer have lost their attractions for me. My customary communings with God have ceased to be a source of light and consolation. Where now is that intoxication of soul? that tranquillity of heart? that peace and joy in the Holy Spirit?"<sup>1</sup> "I feel such dryness," says St. Alphonsus, "such spiritual desolation, that I can no longer find God either in prayer or in Holy Communion. Both the Passion of Our Lord and the Blessed Sacrament have lost their power to touch me. I have become insensible to all feelings of devotion. It seems to me that I am a soul without either faith, hope, or charity—in a word, a soul forsaken by God."<sup>2</sup> This affliction can be very terrible when it is prolonged indefinitely. As a rule, however, it subsides and gives place to peace according as the soul detaches herself from enjoyment and clings to nothing but the good-pleasure of God.

How are we to receive consolations and aridities? This

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<sup>1</sup> *Serm. in Cant.*, liv.

<sup>2</sup> *Peines intér.*, 2.

is a point where many souls turn out of the right path. To avoid going astray ourselves, we must keep our eyes constantly fixed on our objective. Now we are striving for the perfection of the spiritual life, which means the perfection of charity. Love is manifested by its activities. It is perfect when it has acquired sufficient power and mastery to establish us firmly in conformity with God's will in all its likes and dislikes, consequently in the resolution to accomplish promptly and generously everything that belongs to the signified will and to abandon ourselves unreservedly to all the dispositions of Divine Providence. This implies a love that is sincere, active, energetic, that gives itself absolutely to God and responds with perfect docility to the inspirations of His grace. It is what Sts. Francis de Sales and Alphonsus regard as "the only true devotion and genuine love of God, the only end, therefore, that we should propose to ourselves in our prayers, our Holy Communions, our mortifications, and all our other practices of piety."<sup>3</sup>

But if "true devotion consists in the firm resolution to do nothing and desire nothing except what God wills,"<sup>4</sup> it follows that consolations are not devotion, nor aridities indevotion. For this firm and steadfast resolution can remain deeply rooted in the soul in spite of aridities, whereas we may have only a superficial and inconstant imitation of it in the midst of consolations, as experience proves.

Consolations and aridities are not even a secure criterion, since devotion resides essentially in the will, not in the feelings. Consequently it must not be judged by our emotions, but by its activities, as the tree is judged by its fruit. The emotions resemble the blossoms: they make a beautiful show, full of generous promise. But how often, alas! will that promise fail to be fulfilled! To what illusions sensible devotion is exposed!

Consolations and aridities, duly sanctified, are a way

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<sup>3</sup> St. Lig., *Refl. pieuses*, xxxix.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*, *Relig. Sanct.*, c. xiii.

which<sup>4</sup> leads to our end; but they are not the only or the principal way. It is in the signified will of God we shall find the means that are fundamental, regular, and constant. We have already pointed them out. Consolations and aridities are but accidental and variable means which God provides us with according to His good-pleasure. They have a very real, sometimes even a decisive influence. But they should never cause us to forget the essential means. From all this it follows that we must not attach too great an importance to the presence or absence of sensible devotion. Our chief concern ought to be the end and the indispensable means. Let the second place be given to consolations and aridities.

Another consideration also worth pondering is this: consolations and aridities become a powerful support when duly sanctified, but a dangerous rock when abused, which happens not seldom.

Sensible devotion, and particularly spiritual sweetnesses, are very precious graces. They inspire us with horror and disgust for the pleasures of the world which constitute the attraction of vice. They give us the will and the power to walk, to run, to fly along the ways of prayer and virtue. Sadness contracts the heart, whilst joy dilates it. This dilation helps us powerfully to mortify our senses, to repress our passions, to renounce our own wills and to endure trials with patience. It urges us to greater generosity and more lofty aspirations. The abundance of divine sweetness makes mortification a delight and obedience a pleasure: we rise promptly at the first sound of the bell; we miss no opportunity for practising virtue; all our actions are done in peace and tranquillity. "Nothing makes us suffer," says St. Alphonsus, "or rather injuries, afflictions, reverses, persecutions, in short, everything becomes a source of joy, because everything gives occasion for offering sacrifice after sacrifice to God, and for contracting with His Divine Majesty a union that is always growing more and more intimate." <sup>5</sup> According

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<sup>5</sup> *Relig. Sanct.*, c. xiii.

to St. Francis de Sales, consolations "excite the appetite of the soul, comfort the mind, give to the promptitude of devotion a holy joy and cheerfulness which render our actions beautiful and agreeable. The very least of the consolations of piety is more precious in every way than the sweetest of worldly pleasures." <sup>6</sup> Sensible devotion can consequently be called the sun of our spiritual life. Undoubtedly, promptitude, facility, and alacrity in the service of God are extremely desirable when they spring from the soul's thorough and universal detachment and long practice of virtue, that is to say, when they are the fruits of perfectly acquired virtue. But we should not despise the facility produced by heavenly favours and sensible devotion.

God forbid that we should say with Molinos: "Whatever sensibility we experience in the spiritual life is abominable, detestable, and unclean." This is one of his condemned propositions. "Spiritual persons," writes Suarez, "should not despise the feelings of devotion which they experience in the sensitive appetite. Such sensible devotion is not peculiar to beginners, because it can come from the most perfect and sublime contemplation. Besides, it assists and disposes the soul to practise contemplation with greater ease and constancy." <sup>7</sup> Our sensitive faculties are rightly ordered and their activities very useful when they carry us towards God. Then all our powers, superior and inferior, work in harmony and mutually support one another. And our prayer is more complete, inasmuch as we are praying with the whole of ourselves.

This is the attractive side of consolations; but there is another side. It is possible for one to become inordinately attached to them, to become greedy of them, like a spiritual epicure, or to make them an occasion of self-complacency and contempt of others. The danger is more serious if they come from either a natural or a

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<sup>6</sup> *Vie dévote*, IV, c. xiii.

<sup>7</sup> *De Relig.*, T. IV, I, ii, c. xviii, N. 4.

diabolical source. It is true, when they have God for their author they incline us to obedience, humility, the spirit of sacrifice, in fact, to all the virtues. Nevertheless, even then, nature and the demon will endeavour to mingle their own activities with the divine. This is not a sufficient reason for rejecting the consolations. Still, we must not forget that abuse and illusion are always possible.

With regard to aridities, observe, first of all, with St. Alphonsus, that they can be either voluntary or involuntary. They are voluntary in their cause when we allow our minds to become dissipated, our affections to attach themselves to created things, our wills to follow their caprices, and when in consequence we commit a multitude of little faults without making an effort to correct them. It is no longer a case of simple dryness of sensibility, it is languor of the will. "This state it such," says St. Alphonsus, "that unless the soul does violence to herself in order to escape from it, she will go from bad to worse. And God grant she does not fall after a time into the greatest of misfortunes! This kind of aridity resembles consumption, which never kills at once, but infallibly leads to death."<sup>8</sup> We must do all that depends on us to get rid of it; and if it persists in spite of our efforts, let us accept it resignedly as a merciful chastisement of our faults. "Involuntary dryness is that experienced by one who is endeavouring to walk in the ways of perfection, who guards against all deliberate sin, practises prayer,"<sup>9</sup> and faithfully discharges every duty. It is of this we now desire to speak.

Spiritual aridities and sensible desolations constitute an excellent purgatory where we can pay our debts to divine justice on easy terms. Still more truly can they be described as a crucible designed for the purification of souls. From an abundance of heavenly favours, the soul derives the courage to detach her affections from earthly objects and attach them securely to God. But she still

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<sup>8</sup> *Peines intér.*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*, *loc. cit.*

seeks herself in many ways, and perhaps unconsciously : she makes her peace to depend upon the most unstable of all things : the emotions of her sensitive part ; she is unduly attached to consolations ; she deludes herself with the belief that she is rich in virtue ; she is consequently too little emptied of self to be filled with God. Her condition is very pleasing to nature, which always desires to see, to know, and to feel ; but it does not so well satisfy the requirements of divine love which forgets self and finds all its contentment in what pleases the Beloved. The soul would therefore remain always weak, subject to many failings, and imperfectly emancipated from the toils of self-love, unless God in His goodness made her submit to a treatment as painful as it is persistent.

The first malady requiring to be cured is a spiritual gluttony which seizes on consolations with insatiable avidity, a refined sensuality which finds its most delicate aliments in the sweetness of devotion. God now comes and puts the invalid on a diet, and if necessary on a starvation *régime*, in order to weaken and extinguish this evil by the withdrawal of its nourishment, and in order that the soul may learn in time to dispense with enjoyment, to seek God purely, and to be less dependent on the emotions.

Another evil that clamours for remedy, and an evil still more subtle and dangerous, is spiritual pride. When God favours a soul with a flood of consolations, she easily comes to believe that she is further advanced than is really the case ; vainglory and presumption take possession of her ; she begins to look down upon others and to judge them with severity. Then God plunges her again and again, and as often as needful, into aridities, obscurities, and other such afflictions. According to our holy father, St. Bernard, " pride, whether of the present or of the future, is invariably the cause of the subtraction of grace." <sup>10</sup> God designs to prevent or to repress it, in

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<sup>10</sup> *Serm. in Cant.*, liv.

order to deliver us from its poison. The consciousness of her impotence and misery will make the soul understand that she can do nothing without the divine assistance, and that she is worth but very little even after receiving such an abundance of grace. She will accordingly humble herself to the dust before the awful Majesty of God; her prayer will be the prayer of the lowly; she will freely ask advice, and show herself in all things simple and docile; the knowledge of her own misery will render her compassionate to others. And this afflicting trial will be prolonged until it has so humbled her, so annihilated her in her own eyes, that nothing of self-complacency or presumption remains in her, nothing but distrust of self and confidence in God: until, therefore, it has emptied her of pride and filled her with humility.

Delivered thus from pride and sensuality, the two plagues of the spiritual life, the soul is accessible to grace and fully disposed to receive the beneficent action of heaven. Now she will make sure and rapid progress in perfect, pure, and solid virtue. And if it has pleased God to reserve for her His noblest gifts, she is now in a condition to use them well: for, according to our holy father, St. Bernard, "great trials prepare us for the reception of great graces; the latter never come except in the wake of the former."<sup>11</sup>

But instead of receiving such favours, she may find herself a prey to further affliction. Spiritual aridities and sensible desolations are indeed quite compatible with that generous resolution which is the essence of true devotion, and even with the promptitude, facility, and alacrity which denote perfectly acquired virtue. Nevertheless, by drying up the copious streams of pious thoughts and holy affections, they rob the soul of the supplementary strength and joy which consolations imparted, and leave in their place suffering and difficulties. They are not temptations in the strict sense of the word, because they do not directly incite the soul to evil. But the demon makes use of them

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<sup>11</sup> *Serm. div.*, 91.



in order to sow his cockle in the wheat-field of the Lord. God communicates no more lights, no more devotion : has He become indifferent, irritated, implacable? And nevertheless, it seems to us that we cannot do any better. Then come fear and diffidence. The clouds are gathering in the sky and threaten to burst in storm. Nature, obviously, cannot find her account in such a condition of things ; she is weary of sufferings so protracted and the end not yet in sight ; and she urges us to seek from creatures the consolation we no longer receive from God.

In this way, then, consolations and aridities are designed by God to play a very important part in the sanctification of souls. But they can also prove very dangerous. In their action on the soul, they supplement and correct each other. Consolations enkindle the love of God, whilst aridities extinguish self-love : if the sense of divine sweetness elevates us, the consciousness of our miseries casts us down again ; if desolation breeds discouragement, sensible devotion inspires confidence. It is for God alone to send or to recall both the one and the other. He alternates or combines them in the manner most conducive to our interests, and with equal firmness and wisdom. As a rule, He begins with consolations in order to gain our hearts and support our weakness. When the soul has made some progress, and is strong enough to endure more energetic treatment, He sends her a preponderance of suffering. We have such need to die to ourselves ! As St. Alphonsus remarks : " All the saints had to suffer these aridities, these spiritual desolations. In fact, aridities were more usual with them than sensible devotion. God bestows transient favours of this kind only seldom, and usually on souls as yet very feeble, in order that they may not come to a stand-still on the road to perfection. As for the delights that are to be the reward of our fidelity, it is only in paradise we can expect to enjoy them. . . . Whenever you feel forsaken, comfort yourself with the thought that you have the Divine Consoler with you. You complain of an aridity of two

years' duration. But St. Jane de Chantal had to endure that trial during forty years. St. Marie-Madeleine de Pazzi for five years had to support continual pains and temptations without being granted the slightest relief." <sup>12</sup> St. Francis of Assisi spent two years in such desolation that he seemed to have been abandoned by God. But after he had humbly submitted to this terrible trial, the Saviour restored to him in an instant his usual happy tranquillity. Therefrom St. Francis de Sales concludes that, "since the greatest servants of God were subjected to these afflictions, those who are the last and least in His service should not be surprised if they feel something of them also." <sup>13</sup> God does not always follow the same path in conducting souls to sanctity. Generally speaking, it seems to be when they are approaching the consummation of their virtue that He sends them the bitterest trials. The more dearly He loves them, the more He cultivates and purifies them. But the most searching process of all He postpones until they are strong enough to endure its rigours.

Let us now sum up what we have been saying on this subject, and draw the practical conclusion. The object we must aim at is perfect love, which unites the soul intimately to God by an absolute conformity of will. This is the only true, the essential devotion. With a holy ardour we must seek the means which depend upon us: they are indicated to us by the signified will of God. Consolations, even those of divine origin, do not constitute devotion, nor does indevotion consist in involuntary aridities. Both consolations and aridities are providential helps, but by abuse we can make of them serious hindrances. Which of the two would be the more profitable for us? We cannot tell. Besides, the choice does not rest with us: God has reserved that to Himself. Therefore, our wisest course is to remove the

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<sup>12</sup> *Conf.*, 5, 5, et *Peines intér.*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Vie dévote*, P. IV, c. xv.

voluntary causes of aridity, to make ourselves virtuously indifferent, and then to abandon ourselves unreservedly to the dispositions of Providence.

This doctrine has in its favour the multitude of saints who made it the rule of their conduct. We shall cite only the two Doctors we have chosen as our special guides, and in the first place St. Francis de Sales. "It will happen," he writes, "that you will enjoy no consolation in your practices of devotion. That, undoubtedly, is the good-pleasure of God. Hence the necessity to remain absolutely indifferent to consolation or desolation. This self-forgetfulness implies abandonment to the divine good-pleasure in all temptations, aridities, drynesses, aversions, and repugnances. For we can see that good-pleasure in all these states of soul, when they are not due to any fault on our part, and when they contain nothing sinful." He repeatedly counsels us to surrender ourselves fully and perfectly to the care of Divine Providence, as a little child abandons itself to the care of its nurse, or as the sweet Infant Jesus in the arms of His dear Mother. And he adds: "If consolations are offered you, receive them with gratitude; if they are refused, desire them not, but try to keep your heart ready to welcome whatsoever Providence may send, and as far as possible with the same satisfaction. . . . You must have a strong resolution never to give up prayer, no matter what difficulties you may encounter in that holy exercise. And you must never apply yourself to it, preoccupied with a longing to be consoled and favoured. For that would not be conforming your will to Our Lord's, Who desires that we should enter prayer resolved to suffer the affliction of continual distractions, aridities, and disgust, should this be His good-pleasure, and to be as content in this state as if we enjoyed a superabundance of consolations and perfect tranquillity. Provided we always accommodate our wills to the will of His Divine Majesty, remaining in an attitude of simple expectation and in a disposition to receive lovingly whatever Providence may ordain, whether in our

prayer or outside it, He will see to it that everything is made conducive to our profit and pleasing in His sight.”<sup>14</sup>

It is in this sense the holy Doctor said : “ I desire very little ; and the little I desire I desire very little. In fact, I have hardly any desires. And if I were to be born again, I should prefer to have none at all. If God comes to me in consolations, I shall go to Him ; if He does not will to come to me, I shall remain just where I am, and shall not attempt to go to Him ”<sup>15</sup>—by any voluntary desire of consolations. And in fact, “ he practised this perfect indifference amidst aridities and consolations, disgust and dryness, activities and sufferings.” Here is the testimony of St. Jane de Chantal : “ He used to say that the proper way to serve God was to follow Him without any support from consolation or sentiment, without any light but that of pure and simple faith. That is why he loved dereliction, abandonment, and interior desolation. He once told me that he didn’t mind whether he was in a state of consolation or desolation. When Our Lord granted him sensible devotion he received it with simplicity ; if it were denied him, he thought no more of it. Nevertheless, it is true that, as a rule, he enjoyed great interior sweetness. And one could divine it from his looks.”<sup>16</sup>

The ideal of the holy Bishop, in the matter with which we are now occupied, was, then, that wise statue of his which desires neither to be put forward by consolations nor backward by aridities, but remains motionless in a peaceful indifference, ready to allow itself to be moved one way or another at the pleasure of its Master.<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact, he did not demand of St. Jane de Chantal “ that she should neither love nor desire consolations, but only that she should not set her heart on them. A simple desire is not contrary to resignation. But the same

<sup>14</sup> *Entret.*, ii, vi, xviii, xxi.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>16</sup> *Vie*, I, v, et append., *Lettre de Ste. J.-F. de Chantal*.

<sup>17</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, vi, c. xi.

cannot be said of the impatient desire that is characterised by a palpitation of the heart, a flapping of the wings of the soul, so to speak, and an agitation of the will." She might "complain of her afflictions to God lovingly and with moderation. Our Lord is pleased when we talk to Him about the tribulations He sends us, as little children to their dear mother when she has chastised them." But she must preserve that spirit of liberty which is attached neither to consolations nor even to spiritual exercises, and which accepts afflictions with as much meekness as the flesh will allow. "In this way, at the moment when it is necessary for her to drink the chalice of bitterness and, so to say, give the final sanction of her free consent, she will have sufficient indifference to say to God: Not my will but Thine be done."<sup>18</sup>

The holy Doctor goes even somewhat further: "You wish to have a cross, but you would prefer one of your own choice. That is not the right disposition. The cross I desire both for myself and for you is none other than the cross of Jesus Christ. Let Him send us all the aridities He pleases, provided He preserves us in His holy love. We can never serve Him well unless we serve Him in the manner He requires to be served. Now, He requires that you serve Him without relish, without feeling, with repugnances and distress of mind. Such service does not give you much satisfaction, but it greatly pleases Him; it is not to your taste, but it is in accordance with His good-pleasure. Imagine that you were never to be delivered from your affliction. You would then say to God: 'Lord, I am Thine! If my sufferings give Thee satisfaction, increase both their number and their duration.' I have confidence in Our Lord that this would be your attitude, and that you would think no more about the matter. At least, you would not any longer worry. Adopt the same attitude now. Make friends with your troubles as if you were destined to live always together.

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<sup>18</sup> *Lettres*, 390, 391.

And you will find that when you have ceased to think of your deliverance, God will think of it; and when you have suppressed these over-eager desires, He will hasten to help you." <sup>19</sup>

In short, the Saint seemed to prefer suffering to consolation. In some passages he almost appears to solicit suffering both for himself and for his holy daughter in Christ. Generally, however, he recommends an absolute indifference with regard to all spiritual varieties. For himself, he would have wished to be without any desire, in order to conform himself the more perfectly to the adorable will of God, which was the well-beloved rule of his conduct. It is evident, and he acknowledges it himself, that he actually had extremely ardent desires for the salvation of souls and for his own advancement in virtue, because these are made obligatory by the signified will. But he desired even such objects only according to the will of God, neither more nor otherwise.

The doctrine of St. Alphonsus differs in no respect from that of the pious Bishop of Geneva. It may be summarised as follows :

I.—When God consoles us by His loving visitations and makes us feel the presence of His grace, we must not refuse these favours, as certain false mystics have pretended to do. They are in truth more precious than all earthly riches and honours. We must rather receive them with gratitude. But we must not enjoy their sweetness with the greedy appetite of the spiritual epicure, nor must we consider ourselves so favoured as the reward of our superior merit. Such pride and sensuality would be displeasing to God and would oblige Him to withdraw and leave us in our misery. Let us humble ourselves by keeping before our eyes the sins we have committed in the past, and rather look upon these favours as the pure effects of the divine bounty. God gives them to us in order that we may be better disposed to make the sacrifices

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

which He intends to demand of us, or perhaps to support the trials which He is about to send. In consolation we must prepare for tribulation. "Let us therefore offer ourselves to endure all the interior and exterior sufferings *in store for us*, sickness, persecutions, or spiritual desolations, saying: Lord, I am entirely at Thy disposal. Do with me whatsoever Thou pleasest. Give me the grace to love Thee always and to accomplish Thy holy will: I ask for nothing more."

II.—In spiritual desolation we must be resigned. "I do not pretend that we should suffer no affliction at seeing ourselves deprived of God's sensible presence. We cannot help being afflicted at such a loss, or even complaining of it, since our Divine Saviour Himself complained of it on the cross." But we should imitate His perfect resignation and that of the saints. "They had more experience of aridities than of sensible consolations; and what they longed and prayed for all their lives was rather spiritual fervour in suffering than sensible fervour in enjoyment." Are you in a state of aridity? Be patient, and do not neglect any of your ordinary devotions, particularly mental prayer. Do not imitate those persons who, when consolation leaves them, show how little supernatural they are by abandoning their pious enterprise, relaxing their austerities, and ceasing to guard their senses; so that they lose all the fruits of their former labours. Perhaps it appears to you that your aridities are the punishment of your faults? Then accept the merciful chastisement with humility, and do all in your power to remove the cause of your lamentable condition; that is, such or such a natural affection, a want of habitual recollection, an eagerness to see, to know, and to say everything. Remember that, if you received your desert, you would never more have experience of joy. Above all, practise resignation, and trust more than ever in the goodness of God. For now you are given a special opportunity of rendering yourself particularly dear to your Divine Spouse. Continue to seek Him, therefore, with

good courage. Possibly He will not return with His consolations. What matter, so long as He gives you the grace to love Him and to accomplish all that He wills?

"A strong love is more pleasing to God than a tender love." Let us humbly resign ourselves to the divine will, and we shall discover that "desolation is more to our advantage than any sensible devotion." And the holy Doctor recommends us to recite this admirable prayer:

"Jesus, my hope, my love, the only love of my soul! I do not deserve that Thou shouldst impart to me Thy consolations and sweetness. Reserve them for the sinless souls who have always loved Thee. As for me, who have so often offended Thee: I am unworthy of them, and do not ask them of Thee. There is only one thing I desire of Thee, and it is this: Grant that I may love Thee, O my God! Grant that I may accomplish Thy will during my whole life, and then dispose of me in the manner that pleases Thee best. Unhappy me! I have deserved to be condemned to much worse darkness, terror, and desolation, in order to expiate the many injuries I have done Thee. Had I been given my desert, hell would now be my portion, where, separated and banished eternally from Thee, I should have to join in the everlasting lamentations of the lost, deprived of the power to love Thee any more forever. Ah, my Jesus, save me from so horrible a doom. I am ready to submit to any other penalty.... Give me the grace to conquer my temptations, to conquer myself. I desire to be all for Thee alone. I consecrate to Thee my body, my soul, my will, my liberty. I no longer desire to live for myself, but only for Thee. Afflict me *as it pleases Thee*; give me only Thy grace and Thy love, and I shall be content to be deprived of everything else." <sup>20</sup>

Are we not permitted, at least, to desire and even to importune divine consolations or the cessation of aridities?

We may do so, but we are not obliged.

We may do so, on account of the important support we find in sensible favours and the despondency in which

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<sup>20</sup> *Relig. Sanct.*, c. xiii; *Am. env.*, c. xiii; *Conf.*, 5, 5.



persistent aridities might leave us. The Holy Spirit in the psalms, and the Church in her liturgy put on our lips petitions of this kind, the legitimacy of which, therefore, no Catholic can question. But all spiritual writers recommend us to solicit such favours only with a pure intention, with a detached heart and a submissive will. However, if there is full agreement about the principle, with regard to the practice we find divergence enough. Alvarez de Paz, Louis de Grenade, and some other modern authors, are strongly in favour of the petitions. St. Francis de Sales, on the contrary, whilst permitting his Philothea to "pray God to remove this barren north-wind which dries up our souls, and restore to us the gentle breeze of His consolations," urges us elsewhere to "an absolute indifference with respect to consolations and aridities."<sup>21</sup> St. Alphonsus expresses his opinion in formal terms: "Ought you to implore God to make you again experience the sweetness of His presence? Be careful to make no such petition. Rather solicit the strength you need to remain faithful."<sup>22</sup> As the Doctors thus differ, each of us is quite at liberty to follow whatsoever course he pleases.

We are not obliged to solicit consolations or the cessation of aridities. We regret having to contradict on this point some very estimable authors. But in asserting such an obligation they condemn St. Francis de Sales and St. Alphonsus, those two great Doctors of piety, who never recognised it and even repudiated it expressly in their teaching and practice. They likewise condemn the multitude of saints and holy souls who based their conduct on perfect indifference in this matter. Besides, what is the source of the alleged obligation? Consolations, as we have said, are neither the essence of devotion, nor the only means of attaining to it, nor even a necessary means. Neither are aridities indevotion. And instead of being an insurmountable obstacle to progress, they are rather a

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<sup>21</sup> *Vie dévote*, P. IV, c. xiv.

<sup>22</sup> *Relig. Sanct.*, c. xiii.

help of which only too often we have need. The authors in question seem not to realise that if it is necessary to nourish the love of God, it is not less necessary to mortify self-love.

It has been objected that desolations are a malady the cure of which can be obtained only by asking for it. The contrary is the truth. No doubt, when we feel the need of consolations and implore them of God with childlike simplicity, such confidence honours Him, provided it is accompanied with perfect submission to His will. But we show much more confidence when we abandon ourselves entirely into His hands, when we peacefully await His good-pleasure, and accept in advance whatsoever He shall please to appoint. This is at the same time a superior prudence, a more perfect generosity. And what can be better qualified to touch deeply the heart of our Father in heaven?

## CHAPTER XII

ON ABANDONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL VARIETIES OF THE COMMON WAY—(*continued*). DARKNESS, INSENSIBILITY, ETC.

**P**ERHAPS we have now said enough on the subject of interior pains. But as they are the most distressing of trials, we cannot be too well armed to sustain their assault. At the risk of repeating ourselves, we shall briefly examine their most crucifying forms: darkness of mind, insensibility of heart, impotence of will, and in consequence spiritual poverty.

These afflictions have occasionally their source in physical exhaustion. The remedy, then, will be to reinvigorate the body. They can also be caused by languor of the will and the habit of sin, two pests which are the sad secret of a progressive diminution of light, delicacy of conscience, force and fertility, and of a tendency towards spiritual blindness, obduracy, torpor and misery. But in this case it is the will that has given way. Not possessing any longer the courage to discharge its duties, it has suffered negligence to creep in everywhere. Prayer, interior efforts, daily obligations: sloth has spoiled them all. God grant that they who are in this state of tepidity or sin may promptly shake off this deadly torpor and revive their fervour without further delay! That is all we have to say to them. But the trials whereof we speak can be involuntary, too. The soul has remained really generous. Yet because she has ceased to be sustained by sensible devotion, she imagines that she has neither strength nor life. She has no longer any feeling of finding God and enjoying His sweet presence according to her wish. However, she seeks Him as best she can, in prayer and out of prayer, sparing no effort, and never allowing herself to give up from fatigue. Her success, indeed, does not appear very striking, and yet her will remains

absolutely devoted to duty. It is to such generous souls we now address ourselves, to such we say : peace to men of good will. God alone is the cause of your affliction. Leave yourselves in His hands, and submit with confidence to His operation which, if very painful, is also very salutary.

#### ARTICLE I.—DARKNESS OF MIND

Being “ children of light,” we ought to love the light. Never shall we have too great a mastery of the science of the saints. Never shall our faith be too much enlightened : it must always remain more or less obscure whilst we live here below, must always lack the clarity of vision. Nevertheless, the shadows gradually lose their density and the light increases with the progress of study and prayer, and particularly in proportion as the soul becomes purer and more intimately united to God. Similarly, in matters of conduct, we naturally prefer to walk in the light, so that we can see our duties clearly. It is so sweet and so encouraging to feel assured that we are doing the will of our Father.

But the Lord does not will that we shall always enjoy this consolation. “ To-day,” says the Venerable Louis de Blois, “ the Sun of Justice illumines your soul with His rays. He dissipates your darkness, calms the storms within you, and makes you happy and tranquil. But should He will to withhold His light from you, what can compel Him to shine upon you again? Now, be assured He will sometimes cause His brightness to suffer an eclipse in your soul. Look out, therefore, for those seasons of obscurity when the divine illuminations will no longer appear, and you will find yourself once more in darkness, trouble and agitation.”<sup>1</sup> Spiritual dryness, when prolonged, can of itself involve the soul in darkness, according as pious thoughts become more rare and the affections

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<sup>1</sup> *Spec. relig.*, c. vi.

more arid. But God has many other ways of producing this darkness and of intensifying it at His pleasure, when there is question either of our own interior life or of the conduct of our neighbour. The poor soul, frightened and bewildered, asks herself perhaps if He has not forsaken her in His anger. It seems to her that she is labouring in vain, that she can no longer make any progress in prayer or in virtue. Possibly the demon will avail himself of her desolate condition to deliver his fiercest assaults. And whilst "on the one side," says St. Alphonsus, "she has to encounter the most violent temptations inspired by the demon, with the help of her excited concupiscence; on the other, plunged in this blinding obscurity, whatever may be the resistance of her will, she cannot know with sufficient clearness whether she resists as much as she ought, or whether she does not actually consent to the evil suggestions; she becomes more and more afraid of having lost her God, and of finding herself, as the just chastisement of her infidelities in the combat, totally abandoned by Him."<sup>2</sup> If such trials are repeated or prolonged, the soul will experience the cruellest anxieties even on the subject of her eternal salvation.

Souls of good-will, wherefore these fears? God Whose gaze penetrates to the depths of the heart, knows quite well that you are all for Him alone and that your one desire is to please Him. Has He ceased to be Goodness Itself? Behind this exacting severity, do you not see His passionate tenderness, holily jealous of your hearts and determined to possess them without reserve or division? When He punishes your least infidelities, when He sends you trial after trial, remember that it is always His heart of a Father that governs His hand. But His love for you is wise and strong; it prefers eternity to time, and heaven to earth; it designs to conduct you as far as is possible in the ways of true sanctity. Consequently in His very rigours you have a proof of His love. They are also

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<sup>2</sup> *Am. env.*, c. xiii.

a mark of His confidence in you. Whilst you were as yet weak, He attracted you by His caresses and took a thousand precautions. But you would never have died to yourself in the midst of so much sweetness and with such delicate handling. Therefore He ceased to employ those means as soon as you had acquired a little strength. "He deprived you of His consolations in order to emancipate you from the coarseness of sensibility, and to unite you to Himself in a manner more excellent, more intimate, and more secure, by means of the pure faith and the pure spirit. To complete your purification, He has been obliged to add sufferings to privations, at least interior sufferings, such as temptations, anxieties, impotence, which sometimes produce a sort of agony in the soul. But it all contributes powerfully to deliver her from the toils of self-love." <sup>3</sup>

After this general observation, we proceed to examine the principal trials of this nature. There is, first of all, the incertitude we feel about the value of our prayers: they seem to us worth very little indeed. Whilst this feeling lasts, we should simply endeavour to keep our minds on God, and do the best we can. He will be able to understand what we are not able to say to Him. Our good-will cannot fail to please Him, and with that He will deign to be satisfied. What He demands from us is effort, not success. A prayer made in this manner is without consolation, but not without fruit, since it suffices to keep us resolutely attentive to all our duties. It enlightens and sustains us, too, more than we imagine. Besides, says De Caussade, "experience has taught me that all persons of good-will who thus complain really know how to pray better than others, because their prayer is more simple and humble, and because by reason precisely of its simplicity it escapes their reflection." <sup>4</sup>

There is also the incertitude about the value of our acts of virtue. But, says St. Alphonsus, "it is one thing to

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<sup>3</sup> De Caussade, *Abandon*, 2<sup>e</sup> P., iv, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

perform a good act, such as to repulse temptation, to make an act of hope or charity or conformity with the divine will, and quite another thing to be conscious of having really performed the good act. This second point, or the knowledge that we have practised some virtue, affords us satisfaction, but our merit consists in the first, that is to say, in the actual execution of the good work. Now, God contents Himself with the execution of the act and deprives the soul of the consciousness thereof which adds nothing to her merit; and it is our merit that counts with Him, not our momentary satisfaction.”<sup>5</sup> When St. Jane de Chantal was suffering terribly from this trial, St. Francis de Sales consoled her with the following reflection: “The most perfect practice of our holy religion is to content ourselves with naked, dry, insensible acts, elicited by the energy of the superior will alone. We should adore Divine Providence and throw ourselves into its amiable arms, into its bosom. Lord, if it by Thy good-pleasure that I should feel no relish in the practice of the virtues which Thy grace has given me, I resign myself absolutely, although against the natural inclination of my will. I want to experience no more satisfaction from the possession of my faith, my hope, or my charity than to be able to say with truth that I would rather die than give up my faith, my hope or my charity.”<sup>6</sup>

Another incertitude concerns our victory over temptation. This is more trying than the combat itself, even though the latter has been as violent and persistent as an obsession. But let souls of good-will take courage. In the senses and the imagination many things can happen which are not voluntary acts, and consequently not sins. We have really resisted as we should, but the enveloping darkness prevents us from seeing distinctly what has taken place. The will, however, has undergone no change. Experience will soon show that. Let us meet an occasion of offending God by a simple deliberate venial sin, and

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<sup>5</sup> *Am. env.*, xiii.

<sup>6</sup> *Lettre*, 490.

we shall scrupulously abstain from it : we should prefer to die a thousand times. It ought to be enough for us to know that we have watched and prayed and generously struggled. There is no necessity that we should have a clear consciousness of victory won. It is even sometimes better for us to be without such knowledge, as the incertitude can be very profitable to our humility. God wills to make us realise by painful experiences, frequently repeated, the fund of corruption we bear within ourselves, and which, without the assistance of His grace, would lead us infallibly into the worst disorders. The evidence of victory would diminish the humiliation, might even expose our humility to danger. He therefore leaves us in doubt, in order to deepen the humiliation and so safeguard our humility. It is a bitter trial, but it renders us the magnificent service of solidly establishing our souls in a virtue which is the groundwork of perfection. Under such circumstances, we may even feel doubtful as to the state of our souls. Have we succumbed to the force of the temptation? Are we still in the grace of God? We must not be over-anxious to reassure ourselves on this point.

“ You desire to know for certain that God loves you ? ” asks St. Alphonsus. “ But at the moment He does not will to impart to you this knowledge. He wills that you should just humble yourself, trust in His goodness, and resign yourselves wholly to His good-pleasure. Besides, it is a maxim, received as incontestable by all the masters of the spiritual life, that when a person of timorous conscience is in doubt as to whether he has lost the grace of God, it is certain that he has not lost it. For no one can lose God without being fully aware of the fact. Moreover, according to St. Francis de Sales, the resolution you have, at least, in the depths of your heart, to love God and not to cause Him the slightest displeasure by deliberate purpose, is a manifest sign that you are still in His grace. Abandon yourself, therefore, into the arms of divine mercy, protest that you desire nothing but God alone and His good-pleasure, and banish every fear. Oh, how



agreeable to the Lord are the acts of confidence and resignation we make in the midst of this terrifying darkness." 7

Of all these incertitudes, the most afflicting is that which concerns our eternal future. Without a special revelation, no one can know, with absolutely certain knowledge, whether he is at the moment worthy of love or hatred, much less whether he will persevere in justice or come to an unhappy end. God wills it so. Had we full certitude on these points, we might perhaps lull ourselves to sleep in slothful indolence, or expose ourselves to danger with foolish temerity. God, therefore, employs the doubt to maintain us in a humble distrust of ourselves and in an ever-watchful zeal; to assert His sovereign dominion and to remind us of our absolute dependence; to make us realise our perpetual need of prayer, mortification, and multiplied acts of virtue; to give additional lustre and value to our faith, our confidence, our abandonment. Let us adore, then, this salutary disposition of Divine Providence, and instead of allowing ourselves to be oppressed with inordinate fear which would only disquiet and discourage us, let us rather cultivate the filial fear that stimulates our activity and keeps us on our guard against dangers. The best way to ensure the future is to sanctify the present. The author of the *Imitation* shows us a man preoccupied with the thought of his eternity, and distraught with anxiety and agitation. "He often wavered between fear and hope. One day, oppressed with sadness, he went to the church, and prostrating himself before one of the altars, revolved in his mind the thoughts which tormented him. 'Ah, if I only knew that I should persevere to the end!' Immediately he heard in his soul the answer from God: 'And if you did know this, what would you do? Do now what you would then do and you shall be very secure.' Thereupon, consoled and strengthened, he abandoned himself to the divine good-pleasure and his anxious wavering ceased. He no longer

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7 *Réflex. pieuses*, xxxix; et *Peines intér.*, 2.

desired to search curiously into what would befall him in the future, but rather sought to discover what was at present the will of God, well-pleasing and perfect, determined to undertake all kinds of good works and to bring them to consummation.”<sup>8</sup> He was a wise man. Let us likewise think of nothing else but the need we have to pray with confidence, to be assiduous in the discharge of our duties, to live in humility, renunciation, obedience, and holy love. And God Who is Goodness itself, the sweet Saviour Who gave His life for His enemies, the Good Shepherd Who runs after the rebellious and obstinate sheep: Jesus will never allow a soul of goodwill to finish a holy life by an unhappy death. Besides, let us never cease to implore the crowning grace of final perseverance, and let us ask it through the intercession of our Mother in heaven. A soul truly devoted to Mary cannot be lost.

Spiritual obscurity can be of many kinds. We are endeavouring to see things clearly when the light fails us, either in what regards our own interior life or the conduct of our neighbour. By God's permission, we find ourselves surrounded with darkness. But whatever be its nature or the degree of its density, it can never rob us of the lights of reason and faith: to the secular priest and the faithful must always remain the infallible teaching of the Church, the Gospel, good books, and spiritual direction, whilst the religious will have in addition his rule and his superiors. And is not that all we really require to direct us securely towards the haven of a happy eternity? This trial, consequently, takes from us only special, radiant, and consoling lights, which indeed contribute a very desirable supplement to our spiritual strength, but which also are very liable to abuse. In any case, they are not indispensable. And if God deprives us of them without any fault on our part, He will know how to make us find abundant compensation by holy abandonment to His will and by our own personal

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<sup>8</sup> I, I, c. xxv.

efforts. Let us allow Him to conduct us as best pleases Him, even though it should be through darkness and desolation. Let us have confidence in our Father, so infinitely good and wise, and have no other care than to accomplish with filial love whatsoever He shall require of us.

So acted St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus: "I thank my Jesus," she wrote, "for making me walk the ways of darkness. I am enjoying a profound peace in them. I would willingly consent to pass my whole religious life in this subterranean obscurity into which He has brought me. My sole desire is that my darkness may obtain light for sinners. I feel happy, yes, very happy at being left without consolation."<sup>9</sup>

## ARTICLE II.—INSENSIBILITY OF HEART, DISGUST, ETC.

We repeat it: there is no question here of souls enslaved to passion or weakened by voluntary languor, but of souls firmly resolved to belong to God alone.

"It is sad to be compelled to fulfil the most sacred duties with a cold heart and a dissipated mind, to return to them always without zeal or fervour, nay, to have to drag oneself to them as it were by violence; to find oneself before God without any feeling but one of stupid indifference; to pray without recollection; to meditate without affection; to confess one's sins without sorrow; to communicate without relish; to break the bread of heaven with less satisfaction than material bread; to suffer externally without interior consolation; to carry heavy crosses without feeling that secret unction which sweetens them."<sup>10</sup> Here is the trial we have now to study, admirably described by Father de Lombez. But what are we to think of it?

"This trial," the same author continues, "is very

<sup>9</sup> *Lettre*, 4 à la R. M. Agnès et Souv.

<sup>10</sup> *Paix int.*, P. III, c. vii.

mortifying; but it is wisely regulated by the Providence of God, Who knows perfectly well His own rights and our necessities. Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy decrees are dictated by equity itself; and Thy mercy, too, enters largely into all Thy counsels. . . . Souls of good-will, it is either in chastisement of your faults God withdraws His consolations, or it is for the purpose of increasing your merits. If it is to punish your faults, why not turn your anger against yourselves? If it is with the view of multiplying your merits, why complain of Him? If He treats you according to your desert, what wrong has He done you? And what thanks do you not owe Him, if He designs to make you richer for eternity? Are you afraid that He will make you expiate your faults too easily in this life? Or that, at the cost of a little suffering, He will make you too happy in the life to come? However you try to reason, what you call the divine rigours must necessarily proceed from one or other of these two motives. God does not hate His own work; and He summons no man to His service in order to make him unhappy.”<sup>11</sup>

So long as our wills remain firm and generous, we should banish all inquietude. Let us place our trust in God, as a sick man in his physician; it is now most especially that He is busying Himself with our cure and salvation. Self-love would have our contrition betray itself in floods of tears, and our love for God in sweet effusions of tenderness; it would like to know, to see, to feel each one of our acts of virtue, in order to reassure itself, in order to have something to feed on, something to serve as a subject for its complacency. During the present life we are so miserable, that every recognised gift from God is in danger of being quickly converted into a poison by the artifices of our self-love. Hence God is obliged, so to speak, to conceal from us the graces with which He adorns our souls: He preserves to us the substance of His favours, but removes whatever shines and attracts attention. If we were sufficiently alive to our

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<sup>11</sup> *Loc. cit.*

own best interests, we should regard this conduct on the part of God as a precious benefit, and we should kiss His hand with only all the more confidence, the more heavily it seems to press upon us. In truth, when nature finds itself tortured with these interior crucifixions, and sees no prospect of relief, it is then self-love suffers agony and is almost ready to expire. Ah, if it only would expire, that miserable traitor! Let it be crucified, that domestic enemy of poor souls, that irreconcilable opponent of God and of all good!

But, you will say, what about this fearful indifference with regard to God? It is only apparent and confined to the inferior part of the soul, since the will remains firm and attentive to all its duties. The superior part is devoted to God, and with that He is content. Here is an evident proof of loyalty in this upper region: You are disconsolate in all your religious exercises to feel that you do not love God as you would wish, and all you can do is to complain of it bitterly: My God, I do not, then, love Thee? Oh, how ardent must be your interior and deep-seated desire to belong wholly to Him, since the bare fear of not loving Him afflicts you so much! This is a certain indication that despite your coldness and insensibility and apparent indifference, He has enkindled in your heart the fire of a great love which becomes ever stronger and stronger interiorly, and more mightily inflamed, from the very fear of not loving. Your anguish, therefore, is precisely that which ought to reassure you. But there is another and still better proof. It is that your virtuous acts, to be pleasing to God, have no need of the concomitance of emotion. Of their nature they are spiritual, and produced in the superior part of the soul. Whether the inferior part gives its concurrence, or remains inactive, or even makes opposition, is a matter of minor importance. The essential thing is that our contrition should cause a change in the will, not that it should make the tears flow; that divine love should strongly unite our wills to the will of God, not that it should reveal itself in tender effusions.

The same applies to the other virtues. To obtain this result, sensibility is not required. It is rather an obstacle, in so far as it serves as the nourishment of self-love. And it is just this obstacle God designs to remove by means of insensibility of the heart. The operation is, no doubt, an exceedingly distressing one, but also exceedingly wholesome. And here again, so far from making bitter complaints, we should rather kiss the kindly hand that hurts only in order to heal us.

Insensibility of the heart is a heavy trial, at least for the soul that has not yet arrived at perfect abandonment. But the trial becomes heavier still when to the privation of devotional feelings are added disgust, repugnance, and interior revolt. It is poor nature recoiling before the prospect of great sacrifice, or when the cup of bitterness is already full. These repugnances and revolts have nothing sinful about them, provided we suffer them with patience and do not allow our wills to be drawn away. The only thing lacking, then, is the *feeling* of our submission, since our wills remain united to the will of God and faithful to all its duties. Remember the Saviour's agony in the Garden of Olives, and you will understand that bitterness of heart and the violence of anguish are not incompatible with the most perfect submission. The revolts are restricted to the inferior part; in the higher region of the soul submission continues to reign.

Let us be on our guard against the thought that these trials are a hindrance to our progress. On the contrary, we have here, says De Caussade, the intimate struggles whereof St. Paul speaks, and after him all the masters of the spiritual life; it is by combating here the truly just man delivers himself from the tyranny of the senses; and here are won the great victories which secure to us in this life the peace and submission (relative) of our inferior nature, and the perfect possession of God in the life to come. Such temptations help us to detach ourselves from all earthly objects, to make costly and frequent sacrifices, to overcome our natural propensities in many things, and

above all to practise patience, humility, and abandonment. All this is done in the topmost region of our souls, almost without our advertence and in spite of appearances to the contrary; so that often we really have submission without suspecting it. Instead of being a sign of God's withdrawal from us, these feelings of disgust are rather a very special grace, since they serve to bring home to us our weakness and perversity, and so lead us to place all our hope and confidence in the goodness of God.<sup>12</sup>

At such times to do nothing contrary to the divine will, to refrain from despairful lamentations, to repeat our *fiat* with humility: here is the perfect submission which has its roots in love, and in the purest love. Oh, if we only knew, under these trials, how to maintain the silence of respect, of faith, of adoration, of submission, of abandonment and sacrifice! We should have found the great secret of sanctifying, yea, and of sweetening sufferings. But we require to be exercised in this, to be formed to it gradually; and whenever we happen to fail in it, we must be careful not to worry, but must hasten back to our filial abandonment with a peaceful and tranquil humility. We can then confidently count upon the succours of grace. When God sends us heavy crosses, and sees us with the good-will to carry them as we ought, He never can refuse to support us invisibly, so that the greatness of our strength and our peace equals and sometimes even surpasses the greatness of the trials. But we must keep on praying, and keep on eliciting our interior acts, no matter how dry, and poor, and miserable they appear. They will not have much relish for us, but they will be very pleasing to God Who beholds our good-will. Happy the souls who, following the example of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, make it their aim to console their sweet Master instead of always demanding to be consoled by Him!

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<sup>12</sup> De Caussade, *op. cit.*, II, iv, 6; v, 15; vi, 2.

## ARTICLE III.—IMPOTENCE OF THE WILL

Perhaps the difficulty comes from physical exhaustion. If so, the remedy is, obviously, to restore our bodily strength.

Souls less advanced in spirituality, the tepid and the sinful, are much impeded in their activities by their passions, great and small. Let them practise penance and interior mortification, and little by little they will succeed in disengaging themselves from their toils.

A soul that is completely devoted to God, but has not yet been called out of the common way, may be afflicted with the profound aridity of feeling, with the interior darkness and insensibility of which we have spoken. This will suffice to make her experience a certain powerlessness in the practice of the virtues, and particularly in prayer.

In the case of such a soul, the impotence in the practice of the virtues is only relative, in fact, more apparent than real. It is chiefly the lack of power to practise them with *feeling*. From the fact that she has no feeling of love, or contrition, or the other virtues, she imagines that the virtues themselves are wanting to her, and that she is quite powerless for good. But she labours under an illusion. We have already remarked that it is one thing to elicit good acts and quite another to feel a sensible impression of them. God demands the works, He does not demand the sentiment. What is more: if we remain faithful to our duties without the support of sensible consolations and sweetnesses, the good-will we manifest shall be only the more pleasing to Him and the more meritorious for ourselves, because it implies more of the spirit of sacrifice. There is perhaps another source of illusion. We have formed magnificent projects, dreamed of extraordinary virtues, caressed some chimerical ideal, and of course the result has come far short of our anticipations. Thereby we have lost a good many vain hopes and perhaps a little of our pride. But instead of being downcast, we should rather bless God for having kept us humble and brought us back



to realities. In spite of all such deceptions and illusions, one thing must always remain quite possible to us, the one thing, indeed, that is the foundation of all sanctity, that is to say, the observance of the laws of God and His Church, and the loyal discharge of our daily duties. A religious will always be able to keep his vows, to love his rule, to obey his superiors, to live in peace with his brethren, to control his passions, to offer all his actions to God, to endure his troubles with patience, and so to accumulate an inestimable treasure of virtues and merits. What needs he more? Here is the direct road to perfection. It is absolutely safe, and besides it affords ample scope for the most generous zeal.

It is particularly with regard to interior acts and prayer that the impotence shows itself. But here also it is only relative. "The soul," says St. Alphonsus, "feels herself incapable of rising towards God, and of producing any act of charity, contrition, or resignation." What matter! For it suffices to make the attempt, even though it should only be with the fine point of the will. Then, although such acts are without fervour or relish, and even imperceptible to us, God will accept them with pleasure. However, in the midst of all this obscurity, one thing remains always within our power: we can always annihilate ourselves before God, confess our utter misery, and throw ourselves into the arms of His mercy. And then let us not forget that we must pray in whatever condition we may find ourselves. Whether we be in darkness or in light, we must never omit to say to God: "Lord, lead me by whatever way Thou pleasest. Only grant that I may do Thy will: I desire nothing else." <sup>13</sup> And if we hardly know how to express our desires by words or sentiments, we can at least hold ourselves in the presence of God in the spirit of faith, *with a real desire* to receive His grace according to our needs. And this will be a true prayer, because God Who "sees the preparation of our hearts" will understand what we have not the power to

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<sup>13</sup> *Relig. Sanct.*, c. xiv.

tell Him. In a word, we are only impotent for that which God does not demand of us at the moment. And consequently it would not be even expedient for us to have the power or facility we so much desire.

Perhaps our good Master wills simply to try us, in order to establish us more solidly in humility, detachment, and holy abandonment. He will then withdraw His sensible consolations and spiritual sweetnesses, replacing them with obscurity, insensibility, and even with disgust. In that case, we must remain loyally attentive to all our duties, be assiduous at prayer, and courageously support the weight of our cross, lightening it as far as possible with the help of a good book and other means which experience will suggest. Or it may be that God wills to make us pass from the common into the mystical ways. If so, He will gradually suppress discursive, methodic, complex and varied acts, in order to lead us to the prayer of simple regard made with short and more uniform acts or even in a silence full of love. This divine operation is a most precious grace. So far from opposing it, we should rather yield ourselves to it with confident docility. But we shall have to seek in some reliable book, and especially in the instructions of an experienced director, the light and guidance of which we shall then stand in most particular need.

Whatever may be God's motive in sending us this trial, it affords us a splendid opportunity for advancing in virtue and practising holy abandonment. "Believe me," writes De Caussade, "you are very far from losing your time in this prayer. A more tranquil prayer might indeed be possible for you, but you could not have one that is more beneficial and meritorious. For the prayer of suffering and humiliation, as it is the most crucifying of all, is therefore that which best purifies the soul, and makes her most quickly die to herself in order thenceforward to live exclusively in God and for God. Oh, how I love those prayers in which you keep yourself as a dumb beast before God, insensible to everything, and overwhelmed

with temptations of all kinds! What can be better qualified to humble, to confound, to annihilate your soul in presence of the Divine Majesty? This is what He has been aiming at, this has been the purpose of all your apparent miseries. . . . As for the insensibility you complain of, if it does not prevent you from discharging your duties, observing your rules, acquitting yourself of all your exercises of piety, you should regard it as a trial from God, a trial which is common to you with all the saints. Only be faithful! By accepting it you will be practising patience, submission, and interior humility in the most meritorious manner. It will prove prejudicial only to self-love, which it will gradually put to death, and more efficaciously extinguish than any exterior mortifications. . . . You can never attain to a complete distrust of self and perfect confidence in God alone without first passing through these different states of utter insensibility and absolute impotence. Happy states, in truth, which yield such marvellous results! . . . On the other hand, there is no sacrifice so pleasing to God as this entire oblation of a crushed and bleeding heart. It is a true holocaust of most sweet savour. The most unctuous and fervent prayers, the most severe of voluntary mortifications have nothing comparable to it, nothing at all approaching its excellence.”<sup>14</sup>

St. Francis de Sales wrote as follows to St. Jane de Chantal: “ ‘ Woman, why weepest thou? ’ (*John*, xx, 15). But you must not remain a woman, you must have the heart of a man. And provided you have a firm purpose to live and die in the service of God, you must not worry about the darkness, or the impotence, or the other obstacles to your advancement. We cannot avoid such obstacles here on earth, but in paradise we shall have none to encounter. . . . It is God’s will that our misery should be the throne of His mercy, our impotence the seat of His omnipotence.”<sup>15</sup> The holy Bishop then goes on

<sup>14</sup> *Abandon*, P. II, iv, 1, 6; et vii, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Lettres*, 417 et 530.

to exhort his spiritual daughter to remain humble, tranquil, meek, and confident in the midst of her helplessness and obscurity. He would have her to avoid all impatience and agitation, to resign herself to the darkness of her soul, and to embrace the cross courageously, generously, and resolutely.

#### ARTICLE IV.—SPIRITUAL POVERTY

What else but spiritual poverty can be the outcome of darkness, insensibility, and impotence? So reasons he who groans under the oppression of this trial. He deceives himself, however. As long as the superior part of the soul remains attached to the divine will and faithful to duty, the darkness, insensibility, and impotence cannot rise above the inferior part; and consequently the poverty he feels is but an illusion of the imagination. This afflicting trial, as a matter of fact, is rather the source of great spiritual wealth, solidly founded upon obedience and humility, and securely guarded against the ravages of self-love.

Perhaps there is here a misunderstanding. God governs us in His own way, and we have been expecting something different. This is the source of our trouble. To get rid of it we must have a truer comprehension of the divine purposes and enter into them more fully.

We have no intention—God forbid!—of discouraging generous souls. We merely wish to prevent them from running well in the wrong direction. As a rule, our ambitions are too modest. Many of our graces remain unused, with the result that we fall far short of the sublime sanctity and glory destined for us by God. We should, therefore, allow our aspirations after spiritual perfection to take a lofty flight. But let us not forget that they must find their support in God alone, and be regulated in accordance with His good-pleasure, so that we should will our perfection only as He wills it. The desire thus

formed can be full of holy ardour, but it will remain always calm and submissive, because it has its principle in grace and its rule in the divine will. There is another way of desiring perfection which does not come from God. Self-love has been more or less its inspiration, and to some extent at least it follows the guidance of self-will. It betrays itself, consequently, by anxiety, agitation, and over-eagerness. And it deserves to be watched quite as much as the grace-given desire merits confidence. We must, then, strive with all ardour to reach the goal of perfection, and at the same time be constantly on our guard against the inspirations of self-love.

Happily, God comes to our aid by means of those trials of which we are now speaking. Through them He confers on us two benefits, equally precious and necessary: He seconds our desire of advancement by powerfully supporting us with His invisible grace, and He safeguards us against the onslaughts of self-love by leaving us a vivid impression of our poverty. We should, therefore, thank Him for this double effect of His goodness, in adding to our spiritual fortune, and in placing that fortune under the safe guardianship of humility. We shall now enter more into details, with the view of setting forth in clearer light a truth so consoling.

Is there question of our sins and imperfections? Let us say to God from the bottom of our hearts: "I detest my faults and my miseries. By the help of Thy grace I am resolved to do all in my power to get rid of them." He will come to our assistance, yet in such a manner that whilst securing to us the victory, He will foster in us the feeling of self-contempt. Perhaps vain complacency would take hold of us if we found ourselves possessed of courage and strength. He will give us the grace to triumph humbly—that is to say, with a sense of our weakness, and consequently with becoming modesty. Instead of being intoxicated with pride, we shall only think of our abjection and nothingness. Such self-contempt will make us very pleasing to God. And, on

the other hand, when we have progressed so far that now our only pleasure is to please God, nothing more can ever trouble us.

“ So long as we live here below,” says De Caussade, “ we cannot but find ourselves very imperfect and miserable. Now, would you like to have an efficacious remedy for all our evils? Here it is : Whilst detesting the sins which are the source of them, love, or at least accept, the consequences of your sins ; that is to say, the feelings of abjection and self-contempt they excite in you : yet without trouble, without bitterness, without disquiet or discouragement. Remember that God, without willing sin, nevertheless employs it as a very useful instrument for keeping us in abasement. It is this knowledge of their nothingness, growing always clearer, which made the saints so profoundly humble. But the humility that is according to God is perpetually joyous and peaceful. You have a lively sense of your faults and imperfections. This can only be in proportion as God draws near to us, in proportion as we live and walk in His light. For the divine light, as it increases in brilliancy, enables us to see better into our interior and to discover there an abyss of misery and corruption. Hence such self-knowledge is one of the surest signs that we are making progress in the ways of God.” <sup>16</sup>

Is there question of our progress in the virtues? Let us say to God : “ Lord, I wish only to please Thee. I desire the gift of prayer, the spirit of mortification, all the virtues. I ask them of Thee with all the earnestness at my command, and I am resolved to labour indefatigably for their acquisition. Nevertheless, Thy adorable will shall always be the rule of my desires, however lawful and holy. I have my sanctification very much at heart, because such is Thy will, but only in the measure, the manner, and the time that are pleasing to Thee.” God, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, cannot but approve the desire of advancement with which His grace has

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<sup>16</sup> *Abandon*, P. II, iv, 17.

inspired us. Consequently, He will grant our petition. But in order to protect our progress, our patience, humility, love, abandonment, and all the other fruits of grace against the usurpations of pride, He conceals them so well from us that sometimes we cannot refrain from weeping over our imaginary destitution of all virtues. We have much more reason to be thankful for the illusion. For there is no gift, however excellent, which, after serving as a means of advancement, cannot become a snare through the artifices of self-complacency and the attachments which stain the soul. That is why God has to withdraw His own gifts from us. But He withdraws them only to restore them a hundred-fold, when He has purified us of that vicious tendency we have to appropriate, even without our knowledge, what does not belong to us. Therefore, even whilst we labour with a pious avarice to enrich our souls with virtue, we should say to the Lord : “ My God, I am content to be deprived, so far as may be pleasing to Thee, *of the knowledge* that Thou hast granted me the graces and progress I pray for. For I am so miserable that for me to know Thy gifts to me would be enough to convert them into a poison ; and the accursed complacency of self-love spoils the purity of all my good works almost without my advertence and in spite of my vigilance. Thus, O Lord, it is I myself who tie Thy hands, and I implore Thee, of Thy goodness, to conceal from my gaze whatever gifts and graces Thou mayest be moved by Thy mercy to bestow upon me.”

Is there question of the means of sanctification? Let us put our trust in God. He will know best how to choose, for faithful souls, not the most glorious means, or the means most in accord with their desires and anticipations, but the means which will enable them to advance most securely and will establish them most solidly in detachment and humility. What more would you have? In what does the service of God consist, if not in abstaining from evil, keeping the commandments, and employing our powers to the best advantage and

according to the divine will? And when you can do all this, "wherefore desire, with impatient eagerness, spiritual illuminations, devout sentiments, interior sweetnesses, a facility for recollection and prayer, and every other gift of God, if it be not His will to communicate them to you yet awhile? Would not this be to desire your perfection in the manner that suits yourself, not in that which is in accord with His good-pleasure, to follow your own will in preference to His, to have more regard for what pleases yourself than for what pleases Him; in a word, to wish to serve your own fancy rather than the divine will? Ought I then to resign myself to pass the remainder of my mortal existence a prey to my poverty, my weakness, my miseries? Certainly, if such be the will of God."<sup>17</sup> Besides, the poverty is only apparent. It is wealth in reality. For "to be precisely that which God wills us to be is to be very rich," and it is high perfection to accept with a good heart whatsoever He is pleased to assign us. Do you not know that it is even a mark of heroic virtue to be able to support patiently and constantly our miseries, weaknesses, spiritual poverty, interior darkness, insensibility, distractions, follies, extravagances of mind and imagination, whilst at the same time we are doing our best to advance? It is this that made St. Francis de Sales declare that when we aspire to perfection we have as much need to practise patience and meekness towards ourselves as towards our neighbours. Let us bear with ourselves, then, in our miseries, in our imperfections and shortcomings, just as God wills us to bear with similar defects in others.

Therefore, the feeling of our spiritual poverty should not distress us, *with regard to the present*, so long as we have a truly good will. "You are advancing securely," says St. John of the Cross. "Allow yourself to be led and be content. You have never been as good as you are now, because you have never been so humble and submissive. You have never thought so little of yourself and

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<sup>17</sup> De Caussade, *op. cit.*, P. II, iv, 14.



of all worldly things. Never have you believed yourself so evil. Never have you so realised the goodness of God, or served Him with such disinterestedness and purity of intention. Never have you so completely renounced the imperfections of your will and your own personal interests, which perhaps you inordinately pursued in former times.”<sup>18</sup> *With regard to the future*, it only remains for you to try even to love the holy abjection, the contempt and horror of self which come from the vivid consciousness of your spiritual poverty. When you can do this, you will have made a further and a decisive step on the road that leads to perfection. Your apparent poverty, rightly understood and humbly supported, is one of the richest treasures that can be acquired here below, because the sense of it produces a profound humility. By means of it, God prevents the soul from resting her confidence and her complacency on herself, and from slumbering in an idle tranquillity. He obliges her to work out her salvation with fear and trembling. And, consequently, she seeks her support in Him alone; she distrusts herself, she watches and prays, and practises mortification, and she stimulates her spiritual activity, in order to make her calling and election sure.

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<sup>18</sup> *Lettre*, 13.

## CHAPTER XIII

ON ABANDONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL VARIETIES OF THE COMMON WAY—(*continued*). PEACE, FEARS, AND SCRUPLES

### ARTICLE I.—PEACE

**P**EACE of soul is a supremely desirable possession, not alone because of the sweetness it contains, but also and much more on account of the strength it imparts and the favourable conditions in which it places us. It is almost indispensable to one who proposes to live an interior life. So, in Sacred Scripture the Lord wills to be called the God of peace. Our sweet Saviour, at His birth, caused the angels to sing: "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." Very often, when He showed Himself to His disciples after His Resurrection, He addressed them with the touching salutation: "Peace be with you." His Apostles adopted the same practice at the beginning of their Epistles. And the Holy Spirit Himself invites us to "seek after peace and pursue it" (*Ps. xxxiii, 15*).

But if there is a good peace, there is also an evil peace. The true peace is the tranquillity of right order. To attain it, we must have order in our thoughts, in our affections, in our volitions, in our actions and sufferings. That is to say, our wills must be always submissive to the will of God by obedience and resignation. Otherwise there shall be disorder and the opposite of peace. For "who hath resisted the Lord and hath had peace?" (*Job ix, 4*). namely, holy peace.

False peace is the tranquillity found in lukewarmness or sin. "There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord" (*Is. xlviii, 22*): no true peace. God shows great mercy to sinners when He torments them with the stings of remorse in order to arouse them from their fatal lethargy. Their

worst misfortune would be to remain tranquil in their sins. The same, with due proportion, can be said of the tepid soul. She can never enjoy true and profound peace; for her will is not altogether a good will and is dragged in opposite directions by too many unmortified passions. Should she make herself easy in such a sad state, it would be an alarming sign: it would mean that she is beginning to be affected with spiritual blindness, that her heart is growing hard and her conscience drowsy. True peace is only for men of good will. And it has as many degrees as good will has. The majority of Christians who observe the divine law and submit to the appointments of Providence do so only imperfectly, and rather from the fear of hell or the desire of heaven than from the motive of charity. They are, consequently, not so much the children or the friends of God as hirelings and slaves. They must not, then, expect to enjoy the profound and perfect peace promised to them that *love* the law of God (Ps. cxviii, 166). Likewise, as says Grou, "the peace of devout souls, who have not completely abandoned themselves to God, is very feeble, unstable, and apt to be disturbed either by scruples of conscience, or by the terror of God's judgments, or by various accidents of life. When, therefore, does this intimate, solid, and in a certain sense unalterable peace take root in the soul? The very moment she gives herself unreservedly to God."<sup>1</sup> Scarcely has she made up her mind when her pacification begins. It develops and gathers strength in proportion as she detaches herself from all created things in order to belong to God alone. She has suffered, because whilst the love of God inclined her towards duty, self-love drew her to the pleasures of sense or to intellectual gratifications. There was a long struggle between grace and nature. But now that she despises her own will and follows the will of God alone, the trouble has ceased and order has been established. Henceforth, all disquiet, worry, and agitation must disappear, giving place to tranquillity, even to content-

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<sup>1</sup> *Manuel des âmes int.*, Vérités fond.

ment. And when the soul will have progressed so far that she now possesses the complete liberty of spirit, recommended by St. Francis de Sales to St. Jane de Chantal, which attaches itself neither to what is good nor to what is consoling, nor even to spiritual exercises, but to the will of God exclusively, in order that it alone may reign in her : then she shall enjoy a peace that nothing can disturb.

This peace is an anticipated recompense for our labours, a force that sustains us under trial, an index to the progress we have made. The more intimate it becomes, and the more firm, and the more superior to all that used to trouble us in the past : so much the more evident does it appear that we have made solid progress in virtue by detaching ourselves from all things and uniting ourselves securely to God's will alone ; so that the consummation of peace and the consummation of perfection go hand-in-hand and are inseparable, unless by a particular dispensation of Divine Providence. This desirable peace is a result produced by the logic of events, and consequently will continue to exist even in the midst of the most painful trials.

But in addition, when it pleases God and as it pleases Him, He infuses into the soul a superabounding and more sensible peace, a peace the like of which she has never before tasted, a peace which fills her with ineffable contentment and inspires a profound disgust for all earthly things. Nevertheless, even though she remains perfectly loyal to Him, He may, according to His good-pleasure, refuse her this superabundance of interior well-being ; He may withhold from her the feeling of peace which ordinarily accompanies the practice of virtue, and leave her only a dry and unemotional peace. He is also at liberty to grant permission ; as He wills, to the enemy of our souls to try and cast us into trouble, disquietude and agitation. What is to be done then ? We must attach ourselves more and more to the will of God alone, and abandon ourselves fearlessly to the arms of our Father in heaven. For He does nothing and permits nothing

save for the greatest good of our souls. And so long as we remain united to His will exclusively, by faith, confidence and love, no power in the world can do us the least harm.

There are, then, two kinds even of good peace. The one is sensible, sweet and delightful. This does not depend upon us; but it is not necessary, and besides may become the secret nourishment of self-love. The second kind is almost insensible. It resides in the very centre of the soul, in the fine point of the spirit. Ordinarily, it is dry and without savour: we can possess it even in the midst of the most trying tribulations. Being purely spiritual, it is less liable to the appropriations of self-love, and leaves the field more free for the action of grace. God abides in it, as in His proper element, whilst in the depths of the heart He busies Himself with His wonderful, yet secret, and almost imperceptible operations. Indeed, these operations can be perceived only in their effects, that is to say, when under the beneficent influence of this peace we find ourselves strong enough to remain steadfast in the midst of persistent aridities, temptations, violent agitations, the most unexpected afflictions. If you discover in yourself this dry peace, this tranquillity that is proof against trial, you have reason to be grateful to God. It will suffice to support you in the discharge of your duties; it alone is necessary for your progress in virtue. Preserve it, therefore, as a treasure beyond price. Through gradual development, it will become one day your greatest happiness here below. But before you can attain to this, there will be need of many a conflict and many a triumph.

If God should permit nature or the demon to harass us with their temptations, or trials and difficulties to come upon us from all sides, let us do the best we can and not lose our peace. The thoughts and feelings which torment, weaken, and discourage a generous soul, do not come from God. It is the demon who endeavours to rob us of the tranquillity and strength which we require in

order to vanquish him. Let us not commit the mistake of regarding adversity, or even the revolt of our passions, as a sign that God has forsaken us. So long as our wills remain loyal to Him, He is very near us, lovingly occupied with the work of curing us and making us better. Whilst He detaches and humbles us, He is all the time supporting us with His invisible grace; and He will continue to assist us to the end, if only we have the good-will to pray and to struggle. Had we but a right appreciation of the value of these sufferings and combats, instead of being distressed, we should be continually thanking God for sending them. For "we cannot taste the consolations of the children of God until we have first been tried by their bitter tribulations; we cannot attain to peace except through war or enjoy it before the victory."<sup>2</sup>

We have to conquer ourselves, therefore. During temptation, the excited passions are, according to the comparison of St. Teresa the Elder, like unclean animals, venomous reptiles, which rage about the courtyard of the castle of our souls. Let us not pause to look at them, let us fly with all speed, and mount to the topmost part, to the innermost sanctuary where God resides. And there before Him let us pour out our hearts in protestations of love and loyalty, repeated prayers and supplications. This wise diversion will often result in making us forget the savage reptiles, and it will always have the effect of drawing down upon us the grace of God and thus ensuring our victory.

Furthermore, in all our trials, such as temptations, sicknesses, aridities, adversities, humiliations, contempt, persecution, etc., the great means for preserving our peace is a humble and loving submission to the good-pleasure of God. "Oh, how much I desire," says De Caussade, "that you would have more confidence in God, more abandonment to His wise and omnipotent Providence! It is Providence that regulates all the events, even to the very least, of this life. It turns everything to the advantage

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<sup>2</sup> De Caussade, *Abandon*, P. II, vi, 2 et 3.

of those who put perfect confidence in it, and abandon themselves unreservedly to its paternal control. Oh, what fruits of interior peace such confidence and abandonment yield! How quickly and thoroughly they would deliver you from the tyranny of cares, multiplied to infinity, always disquieting and tormenting! However, you cannot hope to reach at a single bound such a height of perfection, but gradually, step by step, and by almost imperceptible progress. Yet you must always aspire to this filial abandonment; you must implore it of God, and exercise acts of it. Occasions will not be lacking. Avail of them, and on each endeavour to say: 'Yes, my God, Thou wilt or permittest this. Very well! I also will it for the pure love of Thee. Help and sustain my weakness.' But all should be done gently, without effort, and with the fine point of the spirit, despite interior revolts and repugnances of which you should take no account except to support them with patience, and so convert them into sacrifices." <sup>3</sup> We should even make an effort to mount so high as "to *love* our crosses, since it is God Himself Who has fashioned them for us, and Who still fashions them for us every day. Let us leave ourselves completely in His hands: He alone knows what is most suitable for each of us. If we remain thus steadfast, submissive, and humble under all the crosses He sends us, we shall find in them at last, if He judges proper, the true rest of our souls. Then shall we enjoy an imperturbable peace when, by our docility, we shall have merited that God should make us experience the altogether divine unction attached to the cross since the hour Jesus Christ died upon it for the salvation of us sinners." <sup>4</sup>

But should it please God to grant us, even when we are faithful to duty and humbly submissive, only a peace that is dry and invaded by manifold trials, we must abandon ourselves to His good-pleasure in this as in everything else. He loves us, and He knows much better than we

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, P. II, v. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

do what is necessary or expedient for our souls. We have but one thing to fear : to prefer our own wills to the divine. " To avoid this danger, we must learn to will precisely what God wills at every moment and in all events. Here is the surest, the shortest, and—I dare to say it—the only path to perfection. All others are liable to illusions, and infested by self-love and pride." <sup>5</sup>

#### ARTICLE II.—VARIOUS FEARS

Let us remember, first of all, that the right to peace has its foundation and its measure in good-will, and that to merit a profound peace we must have our wills fully conformed to the will of God. Even then our peace is not absolutely safe from future dangers. Consequently, we have to adopt the necessary precautions of vigilance and prayer.

We address ourselves now exclusively to generous and prudent souls. Many fears will arise to assail them, and threaten to trouble their peace, no matter how solidly established. To reassure them, we shall begin by quoting the following from Grou :

" I. God never troubles a soul that sincerely desires to approach Him. He warns her, He reprimands her, even with severity, but He does not trouble her. She recognises her faults, she repents of them, she makes reparation : all peacefully. Therefore, if such a soul is troubled, the trouble always comes either from herself or from the demon. Hence she must do what she can to get rid of it.

" II. Every thought, every anxiety, which is vague, general, without any fixed and definite object, can be neither from God nor from the conscience, but exclusively from the imagination. We are afraid of not having said all that was necessary in confession, of having insufficiently explained ourselves, of not having had true contrition, of lacking the right dispositions for Communion, and so on,

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<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, *op. cit.*, P. II, iv, 3.



with a thousand other vague fears with which we trouble and torment ourselves. Nothing of this comes from God. If He sometimes reproaches us, His reproaches have invariably some clear, precise, determinate object. We must consequently despise all such fears and courageously ignore them." <sup>6</sup> But the case would be quite different if our conscience formally accused us of something definite.

We find in De Caussade some very useful instructions with regard to a multitude of fears. As it would be inconvenient to quote them all, we shall content ourselves with the principal.

For example, there is the fear of men. "Whatever they may do or say, they certainly can do nothing except what God wills or permits, nothing that He cannot utilise for the accomplishment of His mysterious purposes. Let us, therefore, banish such fears, and surrender ourselves unreservedly to the guidance of His Providence. He has at His disposal many secret but infallible expedients. He is not less able to accomplish His designs by means in appearance the most contrary than He was to refresh His servants in the midst of a raging furnace or to make them walk upon the waters. We shall experience for ourselves this paternal protection of Divine Providence in the measure in which we trust our all to it with filial abandonment."

There is the fear of the demon and of the snares which he is continually laying for us on all sides, both within and without. But God is always with the soul that watches and prays, and is He not infinitely more powerful than hell? Besides, this very fear, when properly regulated, is one of the graces which help us to frustrate the designs of the evil one. "When to this humble fear we unite an unbounded confidence in God, we are always victorious, except perhaps in certain skirmishes of little importance, where God permits us to suffer slight reverses for our greater good. For such falls serve to keep us always little and confounded before Him, always distrustful of our-

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<sup>6</sup> *Manuel des âmes intr.*

selves, always annihilated in our own estimation. As for more serious faults, we shall never commit them so long as we are preoccupied with this fear of displeasing God : The fear itself should suffice to reassure us, for it is a gift of the very hand that invisibly sustains us. It is, on the contrary, when we cease to fear that we have most cause to fear. Every state becomes open to suspicion when it excludes all fear, even that which is called chaste and filial, that is, a gentle, peaceful fear, unattended with disquietude or agitation, on account of the love and confidence which always accompany it."

" For one who loves God, there can be nothing more afflicting than the fear of offending Him, nothing more horrible than to have the mind filled with evil thoughts and to feel the heart drawn away by the force of temptation, despite one's best efforts. But have you never meditated on the numerous passages of Holy Scripture where the Spirit of God teaches us the necessity of temptations and the precious advantages they procure for souls that do not allow themselves to be overcome? Do you not know that temptations are compared to the furnace where clay acquires its firmness and gold its splendour; that they are represented as a subject for joy, as a sign of God's friendship, as lessons indispensable for the acquisition of the science of the saints? If you bore these consoling truths in mind, how could you allow yourself to fall into the gulf of sadness? True, such temptations never come from God, but is it not He Who always permits them for our good? And ought we not to adore these holy permissions in everything, outside of sin which He detests and which we also should detest? Be careful, then, not to let yourself be troubled or disquieted by temptations. That would be much worse than the temptations themselves."

Assuredly, we ought to distrust ourselves, and take all the necessary precautions to avoid temptation. But *excessive* fear would be an illusion. " Never recoil from the occasions furnished you by God in order that you may

acquire merit and practise virtue, under the pitiful pretext that in shirking the combat you are avoiding the danger of committing faults. Is it thus the soldiers of earthly princes behave? And are we not the soldiers of Jesus Christ? Blush for your cowardice! And henceforth, whenever you meet with a contradiction or a humiliation, say to yourself that the moment has arrived to prove to your God the sincerity of your love for Him. Trust in His goodness and in the power of His grace. This confidence will ensure your triumph. And even if you should happen to fall into some faults, the loss can be easily repaired; besides, it will be as nothing compared with the immense advantages you will have gained by your efforts in the combat, by the merit resulting from your final victory, and even by the humiliation caused you by these slight shortcomings. Moreover, the timidity which would cause you to shun the temptations willed for you by God would draw you into others more dangerous with regard to which you do not feel the same diffidence: for what temptation can be more evident and gross than the temptation to discouragement and to the conviction that you will never succeed in your interior life?"

No doubt, we should have a sovereign horror of sin, and exercise the greatest vigilance in our efforts to avoid it. But we must not confound sin with temptation. Even the most persistent assaults, the revolt of the passions, violent repugnances and attractions, imaginations, sensations: all these things may easily be confined to the inferior part of our souls, produced there without any free consent of our wills, and consequently not alone without any sin, but with much merit. When the temptation is only slight, we can be clearly conscious of refusing consent. But the case is very different "when God permits us to be assailed with much vehemence. For then, on account of the very violent but involuntary commotion in the inferior part, the will finds it extremely difficult to perceive its own movements, and hence remains in great fear and perplexity as to whether it has given consent.

Nothing more is required to plunge good souls into a terrible agony of pain and remorse, which God permits to try their fidelity. Herein, even more than anywhere else, they must follow blindly the counsels of those charged with their direction. A confessor who judges of their conscience, coolly and calmly, is better qualified than they themselves to discover the truth. He knows their habitual dispositions, their delicacy of conscience, and their manifest generosity; whilst the deep distress they experienced after the temptation, and their excessive fear of having succumbed, are in themselves sufficient to prove that they have given no *full* and deliberate consent. In truth (it is impossible to pass so quickly from a supreme horror of evil to a free and full acceptance of it, at least without being aware of the transition. And besides) we know from experience that they who do actually succumb to temptation never have such pains or fears. The greater these are, the stronger is the evidence in favour of the tempted soul." <sup>7</sup> For loving souls, the fear of being at enmity with God is a terrible torment. But possibly God wills to keep them in this crucifying agony for their further purification. Consoled for the time being by the assurances of the director, on the first recurrence of the temptation they will fall back into the same perplexities so long as it pleases God to try them in the crucible of affliction. They must only repeat the same submissive *fiat* with regard to this cruel incertitude as in all other trials, amongst which there is hardly another so useful.

#### ARTICLE III.—FEAR OF GOD JUST AND HOLY

We commit many faults that are only too real. The time comes when God impresses upon our souls a very lively sense of our sins and miseries on the one side, and of His own infinite sanctity and just judgments on the other. Then, as we have already said, trembling with fear in

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<sup>7</sup> De Caussade, *Abandon*, P. II, iv-vi.

presence of the all-holy Majesty, we ask ourselves, in torturing anxiety, what is to become of us? Shall we even be saved? When prolonged and frequently renewed, this penetrating trial is at once a very precious grace and a severe purgatory. The way to soften it and to use the light to best advantage is to conform ourselves with all confidence and generosity to the designs of God. Now, He wills through this affliction to produce in our souls three equally desirable effects of grace, which are: perfect purity, profound humility, heroic abandonment.

And first He designs to complete our purification by the anguish caused to self-love. For a long time now we have been recounting our past sins in the bitterness of our souls, we have been busy effacing them, expiating them, curing ourselves of their ill-consequences. There are at present no more habitual faults; even the slightest negligences are combated. Already the soul has attained to purity of a high degree. And nevertheless the just and holy God plunges her again and again in the bath of repentant love that thus she may be still more perfectly purified and healed. So great is the purity required in one who is to be admitted to intimacy with the Divine Master! Besides, even when we have been purged from our sins, there still remain in us vicious tendencies which we hardly notice, a subtle self-seeking even in the holiest things; for example, an aversion for sacrifice, a hunger for the delicate and delectable pleasures of devotion, fear of humiliations, complacency in our merits, self-confidence, etc. Sad relics of self-love, and an evil so much the more pernicious for that it is extremely artful in disguising itself, and even in making itself loved. Who will discover it to us and cure us of it? Our daily practices of contemplation and penance have begun the work. In order to bring it to completion, God, Who loves us with a most firm and enlightened love, deprives us repeatedly of the sense of His sweetness, and subjects us in addition to a *régime* of interior sufferings and humiliations chosen and measured with infallible wisdom. He

makes liberal use of obscurities of mind, insensibility of heart, impotence of will, and even if necessary of the most humiliating temptations. Finally, there are these rays of penetrating light which He projects, if it so pleases Him, upon our sins and His justice, our miseries and His sanctity. We begin then to know ourselves and to know God. And that which we see so distinctly is, in ourselves, an abyss of corruption and in Him an abyss of purity. Who can describe the emotions of the poor soul at this spectacle: her shame and terror at perceiving herself to be so utterly despicable; her urgent longing to cast herself, all trembling and full of repentant sorrow, at the feet of the thrice-holy God; with what sincerity she acknowledges her faults; with what submission she accepts the penalties due to them; and how grateful she feels to the good Master Who condescends, in spite of everything, to support her still, and even to honour her with His jealous tenderness? For she knows as if by instinct that He still loves her. However angry He may appear, He attacks only her miseries. He tries to deliver her from them, so that she may become all-beautiful in His sight and His very own. If He makes her suffer, it is only in order to cure her. His very rigours have their source in His ardent love for her, and but manifest His holy jealousy. This mysterious severity of Providence is in truth an anticipated purgatory, exceedingly painful and exceedingly salutary, where our sins and imperfections are consumed like chaff in the furnace.

God wills to conduct us in this way to the height of humility, to the sublimity of that rare and infinitely desirable virtue. Our holy father, St. Benedict, assures us that humility will bring us soon to the perfect love which banishes fear, to that happy state where the virtues become so familiar that one practises them naturally, as it were, in the joy of the Holy Spirit. But we have twelve steps to mount, and some of them are very difficult. Should we ever reach the summit if God did not give us His special assistance? That special assistance He offers us

in these spiritual pains, particularly in the penetrating light which illumines His justice and sanctity on the one side, and on the other our sins and shortcomings. When He makes us experience the bitterness of aridities and failures, when He delivers us up to darkness, insensibility, and impotence, when He permits us to be attacked by the most horrible temptations, when He impresses on our souls a vivid sense of His justice and our sins, of His sanctity and our corruption: then it becomes very easy to receive contradictions and humiliations in silence, to be content in any and every kind of abjection, to regard oneself as an unprofitable servant, to prefer oneself to none, to put oneself promptly and without comparison in the last place. The most beautiful meditations on humility, and all the divine consolations we could experience, would perhaps never have given the death-blow to our pride; they might rather have left us too well pleased with ourselves. But the trials and illuminations whereof we are speaking inspire us, as if naturally, with fear, contempt and horror of ourselves. This is why the saints, in the very consummation of their virtues, considered themselves as the reproach of men, the off-scouring of the world, instruments only qualified to damage God's work, sinners capable of calling down the vengeance of heaven on the cities which sheltered them. Often the good Master lifted them up and flooded their souls with His consolations. But whenever He thought it needful He would again depress them, reduce them to nothingness in their own eyes and even in the eyes of the world. When we have passed repeatedly through these bitter humiliations, when we have contemplated sufficiently that abyss of misery which we are, we can hardly any longer take complacency in ourselves, or put our confidence in our own lights and merits. Rather we shall make ourselves very small, as by instinct, under the eyes of God. We shall feel the necessity of supporting ourselves on His infinite goodness, of plunging headlong into the abyss of His mercy, which incomparably surpasses the abyss of

our misery. Here we have the triumph of humility, and, as an unlooked-for result, the triumph of true confidence also, not that which is founded upon ourselves, but that which rests entirely on God alone.

It is God's will to conduct us to this perfectly pure and, I may add, heroic confidence. Nothing is easier than to throw ourselves into the arms of God when He showers His favours upon us and overwhelms us with the marks of His tenderness. But it requires great courage to behave thus in the condition of which we are speaking, which appears so wretched and so little reassuring. In fact we need a superabundance of faith, of confidence, and of love to say to God in spite of our terrors: "Thy justice and sanctity, O Lord, overpower me with fear. But I know the infinite goodness of Thy heart, Thy inexhaustible patience, Thy boundless mercy which I have already so often experienced. My soul and my eternal destiny are the two things most dear to me in the world. I entrust them both to Thee. They will be a thousand times more secure in Thy hands than in mine: for I fear nothing so much as my own weakness." Oh, how such filial confidence will touch the heart of God! Never does abandonment honour and rejoice Him more. And never, let us add, is abandonment more fully justified. Is it not true that the real foundations of our confidence remain unshaken in the midst of all our troubles and commotions? For what else are they but the goodness and power and promises of God, and the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ? The sanctity of our own good works is not the motive of our confidence, but only the requisite condition. And never surely has that condition been so well fulfilled. For these terrible trials, these penetrating lights have purified our souls and caused them to advance to the degree of humility necessary as a preparation for the divine action. In last analysis, it is the lack of confidence and the discouragement it inspires, that constitute the main obstacle to the designs of God. They are even the only danger we have to fear, yet a very serious danger; for they are capable of pre-



cipitating us into the abyss of despair, or at least delivering us up to pusillanimity. But confidence and abandonment dry up this poisoned source of fear, trouble, agitation and depression. By the very fact that they unite us holily to the good-pleasure of God, they preserve our peace of soul, our tranquillity of mind, and our strength of will; they also alleviate the sharpness of our trials and cause them to yield an abundant harvest of the most beautiful virtues.

Whatever may be the bitterness and duration of these trials, we must support them in such a manner that they will serve to purify us more and more, and ground us more firmly still in humility. Therefore, we must be scrupulously careful to persevere steadfastly in confidence and abandonment, whether God Himself directly inspires us with such holy sentiments, or leaves it to ourselves, with the assistance of His grace, to produce and preserve them. Since His adorable will ought to be the rule and measure of our desires, even the holiest, we should try to be always content with whatever He ordains or permits. It should be sufficient for us that He is satisfied; and He will always be satisfied so long as we are perfectly submissive. There is no necessity that we should be satisfied with ourselves. Indeed, "the most certain sign of our advancement is the conviction of our misery. We become wealthy in proportion as we deem ourselves poor, in proportion as we are interiorly humbled, distrustful of ourselves, and disposed to place our confidence in God alone." Far from being confounded by our trials, if only we remain submissive, confident, and generous, we shall rather bless God for them. "For they are really a wonderful grace, much more precious and reliable than the consolations to which they have succeeded. Do not resist. Suffer yourself to be brought down, humiliated, annihilated. Nothing is better calculated to purify your soul. And you cannot bring to Holy Communion a disposition more in harmony with the state of annihilation to which Jesus Christ has reduced Himself for you in this

mystery. He cannot repulse you when He sees you approaching so humbled and overwhelmed under the crushing weight of your many miseries." Thus speaks De Caussade. And he continues: "I have never yet encountered anyone afflicted with these penetrating and humiliating lights for whom they have not turned out to be singular graces from God, and who has not found in them, along with true self-knowledge, that solid humility of heart which is the groundwork of all perfection. . . . You tremble at the state to which you find yourself reduced, and I, in your behalf, bless God for it. There is only one change I should like you to make: I should like to see you adding peace, submission, confidence and abandonment to your self-annihilation. Then I shall have no longer any fears in your regard." <sup>8</sup>

#### ARTICLE IV.—SCRUPULOSITY

Scrupulosity is not delicacy of conscience, but only its counterfeit. A delicate and rightly formed conscience does not confound imperfection with sin, or venial sin with mortal. It passes a sound judgment on all things. But it loves God so much that it fears to displease Him in anything. It has so much zeal for perfection that it wants to avoid even the shadow of evil. It is therefore full of light, love, and generosity. Scrupulosity, on the contrary, is founded on ignorance, error, or defective judgment. It is the fruit of a troubled mind. It exaggerates its obligations and its faults, and even sees them where they do not exist. On the other hand, it may often enough fail to recognise faults and obligations that are very real. One can be scrupulous on certain points to a ridiculous degree, and at the same time be scandalously lax on others.

Scrupulosity is the pest of interior peace. The soul affected by this evil is the slave of a tyrannical master: there can be no longer any question of tranquillity for her.

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<sup>8</sup> *Abandon*, P. II, iii, 2, 4.

"Her slightest faults," says De Lombez, "will be magnified to crimes. Her best actions will appear full of evil. She can never validly fulfil her duties: the cruel enemy of her peace will be as much dissatisfied with the hundredth attempt as with the first." It will pursue her relentlessly in her prayers with the fear of bad thoughts, in her Communion with the aridities inseparable from her violent combats, in her confessions with the fears regarding the integrity or the contrition, in all her spiritual exercises with the fear of performing them badly, in her conversations with the fear of uncharitable remarks, and especially in solitude where she is without counsel or support, alone with her thoughts, alone with the tyrant. "Scrupulous persons fear God, but they make of their fear a torment. They love God, but in their love they can find no consolation. They serve Him, too, but in the manner of slaves: they feel themselves crushed under the weight of His yoke which gives comfort and joy to the rest of His children." <sup>9</sup> In short, they are good souls, often to be envied for their virtues, always to be compassionated for their sufferings.

Scrupulosity is one of the worst plagues of the spiritual life, but it has varying degrees of evil. First of all, it is an obstacle to prayer. The soul enslaved to it turns her attention upon herself; she examines, examines again, is never done examining. And all this time she elicits no acts of adoration or thanksgiving. Does she even think of making an act of contrition or of imploring the grace of amendment? Not she. Too busily occupied with herself, she has no time to speak to God. Consequently, she does not pray at all; or if she does, it is only in a very imperfect manner. For her scrupulosity excites a commotion prejudicial to interior silence and to the attention demanded by prayer. It plunges her in sadness and fear, and thus destroys her love and confidence. It would even induce her to avoid God. At least it prevents all heart-to-heart colloquies with Him and the joys of intimate inter-

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<sup>9</sup> *Paix intér.*, P. II, c. vii.

course. It will go so far as to render painful, and perhaps insupportable, confession, Holy Communion, and prayer : the strength and consolation of pious souls. Outside of prayer, the interior life demands that we should be watchful over ourselves and constantly attentive to suppress the movements of nature and to foster the inspirations of grace. For the accomplishment of this double task, so difficult and so delicate, scrupulosity puts us in a very unfavourable position, because it agitates and depresses us. The troubled mind can no longer see its way clearly. Too preoccupied with certain duties, it will perhaps allow itself to be wholly absorbed by them and forget others. The will, exhausted after so many struggles, may relax, lose courage, and even abandon its resolution in order, more's the pity ! to seek rest and consolation amongst creatures. At any rate, if scrupulosity does not quite put a stop to the work of our sanctification, it often retards and always injures it. Is that perfect faith, which shuts its eyes to the mercy of God and wants to see only His justice, and distorts even that ? Is that perfect hope, which, in spite of the most sincere good-will, hardly dares aspire to heaven and grace, is always trembling with fear, and has never any confidence ? Is that perfect charity, which, although loving God, yet dreads to appear in His presence, never pours out its heart to Him, and feels nothing but terror for a Lord infinitely good ? Is that contrition well ordered, which confuses the intelligence, depresses the courage, and unsettles a soul of good-will ? Is that true humility, true virtue, which banishes filial trust and degenerates into cowardice ?

No, no ! Scrupulosity is not a proof of ardent love, or a sign of a sensitive conscience. Is it a subtle form of self-love, a spiritual egoism, too much preoccupied with self, and not enough with God ? Or is it a sincerely good will that has wandered out of the way ? At all events, it is a real malady of the soul which threatens the spiritual life in its very existence, and seriously interferes with its functions. Thus, whilst others march forward, run, fly,

in the paths of perfection, their hearts dilated with confidence and their souls rejoicing in peace; the poor victim of scruples, though possessing perhaps not less generosity but ill-regulated, wearies himself in vain, makes hardly any progress, if indeed he does not go back, and suffers agonies, because "he wastes his precious time tormenting himself about his duties, weighing atoms, and making mountains of mole-hills." He persecutes his confessors, saddens the Holy Spirit, ruins his health, and wearies his brain. He dares not undertake anything for himself, and can be of hardly any use to others. Indeed, he might only injure those with whom he comes into contact, by communicating his malady, or by rendering piety repulsive and ridiculous. Scrupulosity, if yielded to, is therefore, in varying degrees, a real pest of the spiritual life.

It is assuredly *the signified will of God* that we should combat it on account of its disastrous effects. On this point all theologians and masters of the spiritual life are in perfect accord. They mark out in detail the course we should follow. Let it suffice for us to say here that, in order to conquer this terrible enemy, we must pray much, suppress voluntary causes, and above all practise blind obedience. The scrupulous person may be well instructed, very experienced, and even very prudent in all other matters: but in what concerns his scruples, his malady deranges his mind. It would therefore be folly to attempt to guide himself. Childlike obedience to his confessor, who diagnoses the disease and prescribes the remedy, is his best wisdom and his only hope of relief. This, nevertheless, is no easy matter. He must pray, therefore, with all instance, and implore the grace to renounce his own ideas, and to practise obedience even against his own inclinations. For his conscience being false, he has to rectify it by conforming to the judgment of his spiritual guide.

It is also the *good-pleasure of God* that we should patiently support the affliction of scrupulosity so long as it pleases Him. We can always combat the evil. Some-

times we shall succeed in banishing it altogether; sometimes only in lessening it; and sometimes, by the permission of Providence, it will persist in full vigour despite our best efforts. For it can come from very different causes, of which some depend upon our own wills, but many may be beyond our control.

The malady may owe its origin to excess in work or austerities, to the reading of books that are over-severe, to intercourse with scrupulous persons, or to the habit of seeing in God the terrible Judge rather than the Father of infinite goodness. Or it may have originated in the ignorance which exaggerates our obligations, or confounds temptation with sin, the sensation with the consent. In these, and such-like cases, it depends upon ourselves to remove the causes. Then, the source being suppressed, we shall soon see the end of our troubles.

But it often arises from a melancholy disposition, from a fearful and suspicious character, weakness of the head, or certain conditions of health. All these causes depend more upon the divine good-pleasure than upon our wills. And in such cases, the scrupulosity usually lasts a long time and manifests itself even in profane employments.

The demon is not seldom the author of the evil. He avails himself of our imprudences, he exploits our pre-dispositions, he works on our senses and imagination, in order to excite or intensify scrupulosity. If he sees a soul inclined to be somewhat lax, he pushes her on to greater laxity. But when he encounters one that is timid, his endeavour is to make her extravagantly fearful, to fill her with trouble and anxiety, in the hope that she will end by abandoning God, prayer, and the Sacraments. His purpose is to render virtue insupportable, to engender weariness, discouragement, and despair.

God will never be directly the author of scrupulosity. It can only come from our fallen nature or from the demon, since it is founded on error and is a real malady of the soul. But He permits it; He even employs it occasionally as a *transient* means of sanctification; and in this case,

He controls and directs it with His infinite wisdom, in such a manner as to make us derive from it the spiritual advantage which He has in view. He inspires the soul with a great fear of sin, in order that she may rid herself more completely of her past transgressions, and by redoubling her zeal prevent a relapse. He humbles her so that she may no longer venture to rely on her own judgment, but submit herself entirely to her spiritual father. If there is question of a soul already well advanced, He uses scrupulosity to complete her purification, her detachment, her annihilation, so as to prepare her for the reception of very special graces. It is thus the saints have been put through this trial, some of them, as St. Ignatius of Loyola, at the time of their conversion; others, like St. Alphonsus de' Liguori, when they had attained to the consummation of their sanctity.

There may, then, be many immediate causes of scrupulosity. But there is only one supreme Cause, without Whom nature and the demon can do nothing. Even if we ourselves have been the authors of our malady, we required at least the permissive will of God. Consequently, we must recognise here, as elsewhere, the hand of Divine Providence. God does not love the disorder of scrupulosity, but He may will that we should support it as a cross. His signified will calls upon us to struggle against the evil, and His good-pleasure to endure the trial. So long as it continues we must struggle and endure. God grant we may be able to do so with an abandonment full of confidence!

"In conclusion," says St. Alphonsus, "I repeat: Obey, obey! And I beg of you: cease to regard God as a cruel tyrant. No doubt, He hates sin. But He cannot hate a soul that sincerely detests and laments her faults. 'You seek Me, indeed,' He once said to St. Margaret of Cortona, 'but know that, however ardently you seek Me, I seek you more ardently still. And it is your fears that prevent your progress in divine love.' Tormented with scruples, but always submissive, St. Catherine of Bologna

feared to approach the Holy Table. A sign from her confessor was enough. Immediately she vanquished her fears and calmly communicated. In order to encourage her to the constant practice of obedience in this matter, Our Lord appeared to her one day and said : ' Rejoice, My daughter, because your obedience is very pleasing to Me.' He likewise appeared to the Dominicaness, Blessed Stephanie of Soncino, and addressed these words to her : ' Because you have placed your will in the hands of your confessor, as if in My own : ask of Me whatever you please, and you shall have it.' ' Lord,' she replied, ' I want nothing but Thyself.' At the beginning of his conversion, St. Ignatius of Loyola was so continually troubled with doubts and disquietudes that he could not enjoy a moment's repose. But being a man of faith, full of confidence in the words of the Divine Master : ' He that heareth you, heareth me,' he cried out : ' Lord, show me the way I ought to follow. Although I should have only a dog to guide me, I promise to obey faithfully.' And in fact he showed such obedience to his directors that he was soon freed from his scruples and became an admirable master of the spiritual life. . . . Once again I repeat : be obedient to your confessor in everything, have faith in obedience. ' This,' said St. Philip, ' is the surest way to escape from the toils of the demon ; as, on the other hand, there is nothing more dangerous than to desire to conduct oneself according to one's own judgment.' In all your prayers, implore this grace, the great grace of obedience, and be sure that in obeying you will infallibly save and sanctify yourself." <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Relig. sanct.*, c. xviii; et *Peines intér.*, i



## CHAPTER XIV

### ON ABANDONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL VARIETIES OF THE MYSTICAL WAY

#### ARTICLE I.—THE COMMON WAY OR THE MYSTICAL WAY

**A**T first we shall speak only of prayer, and of that only with reference to holy abandonment. What is the object of prayer? In the first place, we intend thereby to pay homage to God. But we should also employ it as a means to reform our conduct and to advance in all the virtues, especially in divine charity, in order to grow in the life of grace, and by consequence in the life of glory. Prayer enables us to attain this object by the acts which we elicit in it, by the graces which we receive in it, and by the holy dispositions with which it inspires us. And the best form of prayer for us will always be that which most securely conducts us to this end.

The Venerable Louis du Pont had, therefore, good reason to say : “ The capital point in prayer is that we should direct our meditations to the reform of our lives ; and we should remember that spiritual lights are of very little value without practice. We should, then, so profit by the graces of prayer and the lights received in it that we make each day new progress in virtue, becoming more obedient, more gentle, more patient, more obliging, more detached from ourselves, more in love with mean employments, more indifferent to the esteem and affection of creatures, more zealous in going against our own wills and in moderating the impetuosity of our desires.” And in another place he teaches with Alvarez that “ the principal end of a good prayer, and the best fruit resulting from it, is the will to give God all that He requires from us and to acquiesce with perfect conformity in all the dispositions

of His Providence in our regard, being content that He should deprive us, if it so pleases Him, of health, honour, temporal goods and conveniences, that He should withdraw from us His favours and His sensible presence, leaving us in the darkness and cold of winter, that He should deliver us as a prey to temptations, terrors and desolations of every kind. Nothing can be more reasonable than such resignation to the good-pleasure of God. For what does He aim at in conducting us through these hard ways but His own greater glory and our advancement in virtue? And these objects He will infallibly obtain, provided we are faithful and persevering, provided we do not go begging from creatures the consolation He refuses us, or recoil from the cross He offers us.”<sup>1</sup>

To render homage to God is, then, the primary end of prayer. But our own spiritual progress is also an end, and an end we must never lose sight of. Rather we must pursue it with the utmost zeal and assiduity, and beg it of God with insistent supplication and in an absolute manner. Whatever may be the particular form of our prayer, it should always tend towards this object. If it effectively conducts us thither, it is an excellent prayer, though it should be of the commonest type. And if it fails in this essential service, let it be ever so sublime and mystical, what use is it? “These instructions,” continues Du Pont, “are the more necessary to remember because many persons, devoted to dreams of high spirituality, neglect to improve their conduct and to make progress in virtue. Such souls labour under a veritable illusion. The consequence is that, after many years of prayer, they find themselves as little advanced as they were at the beginning.”<sup>2</sup>

There are two ways to the end in question : the common way, or prayer that is not manifestly passive, and the mystical way of obscure infused contemplation with its passive purifications. Visions, revelations, and super-

<sup>1</sup> *Vie du P. Balth. Alv.*, cc. xxxiii et l.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

natural voices, may or may not be experienced in the latter.

Does the common way suffice to conduct souls to sanctity *properly so-called*? According to Bossuet, "one can become a very great saint without practising any kind of extraordinary prayer."<sup>3</sup> But he offers no evidence in support of this statement. In the opinion of St. Francis de Sales, "there are multitudes of saints in heaven who never experienced the ecstasies or raptures of contemplation. For how many martyrs and great saints are mentioned in history who knew no other privilege in prayer than fervour and devotion?"<sup>4</sup> With regard to the martyrs there can be no doubt. As for the other saints, it should be noted that the holy Doctor speaks here only of ecstasy, and says nothing about the antecedent degrees of contemplative prayer. In the processes of canonisation, the Church, according to the remark of Benedict XIV, seeks always to prove the truth of the miracles and the heroicity of the virtues, but "she has canonised many persons without any inquiry as to whether or not they had infused contemplation."<sup>5</sup> But is this because the mystical state is not accounted essential for sanctity? Or is it not rather because it is often impossible to establish the existence or degree of it, after the passage of time? The question remains undecided in principle. As to the matter of fact, according to Poulain, an historical study leads to the conclusion that nearly all the canonised saints had mystical union, and as a rule in generous measure. It is commonly supposed that many of them were not so favoured; but the supposition is certainly erroneous with regard to some and it can be proved with regard to none, although in several cases the requisite documents are lacking.<sup>6</sup>

Does the common way at least suffice to conduct souls to high perfection? This is generally admitted. St. Teresa

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<sup>3</sup> *États d'or.*, xxii, art. d'Issy.

<sup>4</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, vii, c. vii.

<sup>5</sup> *De Canon.*, I, iii, c. xxvi.

<sup>6</sup> *Grâces d'or.*, c. xxviii.

the Elder, as everybody knows, extols the excellence of mystical prayer in the most magnificent terms, and arouses in her readers an ardent desire of it. Nevertheless, for the consolation of such of her daughters as had not been raised so high, despite their best efforts to dispose themselves, she said: "It is very important to realise that God does not conduct us all by the same path, and that often the soul that is least in her own estimation is the most exalted in the eyes of the Lord. Thus, although all the religeuses of this convent practise prayer, it does not follow that all must be contemplatives: it would even be impossible. . . . But she that is not so privileged will nevertheless attain to very high perfection, if she faithfully accomplishes what I have recommended. She can even surpass the others in merit, because she will have to render service at her own cost. The Divine Master treats her as a soul that is strong in virtue. And to the happiness which He reserves for her in the life to come, He will add the consolations of which He now deprives her. Martha was a saint, yet we are not told that she was a contemplative. Had she been, like her sister, absorbed in loving contemplation, there would have been nobody to prepare the repast for Our Lord. Since it is true that, whether by contemplation or by ordinary mental or vocal prayer, we are always serving this Divine Guest, what does it matter if we discharge our duties towards Him in one way or in another?"<sup>7</sup> St. Francis de Sales expresses himself in similar terms: "There are people of high perfection to whom Our Lord has never given such consolations and *quietudes*. They have to do everything with the superior part of their souls, and they cause their own wills to die in the will of God by dint of forceful effort and with the point of their spirit. This death is the death of the cross, which is much more excellent and generous than the other."<sup>8</sup>

From this Bossuet concludes that "it is an error to

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<sup>7</sup> *Chemin*, xviii.

<sup>8</sup> *Entret.*, ii.

make merit and perfection to consist in being either active or passive. It is for God to judge of the merit of souls whom He has favoured with His graces, according to the dispositions with which He has inspired them and according to the degrees of divine love (and other virtues) of which He alone has knowledge.”<sup>9</sup> Let us conclude with the words of De Paz: “All perfect souls are not raised to *perfect* contemplation, because the Almighty has other ways of leading us to perfection and sanctity. Some He forms in an admirable manner by means of afflictions, maladies, temptations, and persecutions; others by the labours of the active life, and the external ministry, exercised with a pure intention; others again He conducts to high sanctity by means of ordinary prayer and universal mortification. And it is quite possible that a soul favoured with wonderful gifts of contemplation may be found inferior, in the perfection of charity, to another not so privileged.”<sup>10</sup>

The mystical way, consequently, is not the only way that leads to high perfection. Nevertheless, we must allow that it leads us thither with the least expenditure of time and effort. In the *Voies de l'Oraison mentale* we have shown the wonderful results of passive purgations, in which God Himself, wishing to purify and simplify a soul, operates with an infallible wisdom that knows the evil and the remedy, and with a firm hand that ignores all our precautions and weaknesses. We have there said that the mystical forms of prayer, particularly the more sublime, have an incomparable efficacy for illuminating our intellects, touching our hearts, gaining our wills, and transforming our lives. Undoubtedly, infused contemplation is neither perfection itself nor the necessary means to perfection; but it is a wonderful instrument for the sanctification of souls; it is the school of high virtue, the shortest road and the most rapid conveyance to perfection, a pearl so exceedingly precious, a treasure so desirable,

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<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, ix, 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> *Oeuvres*, T. III, i-v, P. II, c. iii.

that a prudent merchant will not hesitate to sell all his possessions in order to acquire it.<sup>11</sup>

People are fond of representing the dangers of these exalted and little-known ways. But "if mystical contemplation has its perils, which must not be exaggerated, ordinary mental prayer has its dangers, too, which should not be forgotten. The fear of these dangers does not prevent us from applying ourselves to meditation, because we consider that they are more than balanced by the hoped-for advantages: neither, therefore, is the like fear a sufficient reason for banning contemplation. Mystical prayer is a gold-mine: let us exploit it. Dangers are to be encountered in its practice: let us be ever on our guard against them; let us follow faithfully the divine attraction and avoid at the same time the snares of the enemy. Besides, experience will soon convince us that this prayer suits only generous souls who are ready to suffer everything in order to unite themselves intimately with God, not such as long for enjoyment and exaltation. The contemplative will oftener participate in the crucifixion of Calvary than in the glories and joys of Thabor; hence, if such a soul has need to be tried and humbled, she has still greater need to be comforted."<sup>12</sup>

People also warn us of the dangers of *mystical reading*. But is that the only danger? Is there not something, and much more, to be feared from the ignorance, the prejudice, the sort of blind antipathy that would shut the door of the heart against the Spirit of God? We are supposing, let it be well understood, that the book contains sound doctrine and corresponds to the needs of the soul. We gladly avail of this opportunity to repeat that a wise director is more than ever necessary in the ways of prayer, and he ought, naturally, to be our guide also with regard to suitable reading. Then we have nothing to fear. Or, at any rate, the danger will not now come from the book, but from the soul herself, perhaps over-eager for enjoy-

<sup>11</sup> Lehodey, *Voies de l'Or. ment.*, P. III, cc. i et x.

<sup>12</sup> Lehodey, *Voies de l'Or. mentale*, P. III, c. i.

ment or exaltation. With such a disposition, everything will be a danger for her, not alone mystical works, but also treatises on asceticism, the consolations experienced in the common way, and even Holy Communion. It is not the book, therefore, but this unfortunate disposition that deserves to be put on the Index.

Mystical contemplation depends, above all, on the good-pleasure of God. "He is not obliged," St. Teresa the Elder tells us, "to communicate to us in this life graces without which we can save ourselves. He bestows His particular favours when He pleases, as He pleases, and on whom He pleases. Being absolute Master of His gifts, He can thus distribute them at His pleasure without wronging anyone."<sup>13</sup> "There are perfect souls," writes De Paz, "to whom God denies this grace, because they have not a temperament sufficiently calm for contemplation. . . . He denies it to others in order to keep them humble, because a gift so sublime would lead them to form too high an opinion of their merit and swell them with pride. And others again are refused it in accordance with the secret designs of Providence, which it is not given to us to know."<sup>14</sup> These remarks, however, are to be understood with due restrictions. For St. Teresa the Elder assures us that "God desires nothing so much as to find souls on whom to bestow His favours, and His gifts do not lessen His riches."<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, the more He gives away, the wealthier He becomes. Is not liberality the best means at His disposal for making Himself known, loved and served?

It is with mystical gifts as with all other graces: God bestows them with great liberality, but "as He wills, and according as each soul disposes herself and co-operates." He is obliged to communicate these inestimable favours to no one, however well prepared. As a rule, He waits until the soul is sufficiently purified and already rich in

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<sup>13</sup> *Château*, 4<sup>e</sup> dem., cc. i et ii.

<sup>14</sup> *Oeuvres*, T. III, i-v, P. II, c. iii.

<sup>15</sup> *Château*, 6<sup>e</sup> dem., c. iv.

virtues, but not yet perfect. When she fully opens her heart to His influence, by a generous preparation and faithful correspondence, she is suddenly deluged with light and love; but the inundation is less abundant when the door is only half-open. Consequently, whilst remaining a gratuitous gift, contemplation depends in great degree on the zeal we exercise in disposing ourselves for it and co-operating with the divine action. Further on we shall explain how God Himself perfects the disposition of the soul, when it pleases Him, by means of passive purifications. The preparation whereof we now speak depends upon our own initiative, with the ordinary succours of grace. It consists, as we have said elsewhere : firstly, in removing the obstacles, by increasing the four-fold purity of conscience, mind, heart and will, so necessary for all prayer ; secondly, in positively disposing the soul, by making her a sanctuary of silence and recollection, perfumed with the incense of a life of prayer and adorned with every virtue. She must have a vivid faith, great confidence and love, which imply a corresponding degree of renunciation, obedience and humility. Naturally, we need to be more advanced in all these virtues for contemplation than for ordinary prayer.

This is the doctrine which our holy father, St. Bernard, never tires of repeating. Let us cite only the one passage where he explains the words of Solomon's Canticle : *Lectulus noster floridus*. " Perhaps you also desire," he says, " this happy repose of contemplation, *and you do well*. Only be sure not to forget the flowers which should adorn the bed of the Bridegroom. The practice of the virtues ought to precede contemplative repose as the flower precedes the fruit. Renounce your own will. If your soul is covered with the weeds and nettles of disobedience, how can He give Himself unreservedly to you, Who loves obedience to such a degree that He preferred death to the loss of it? There are some here whom I cannot understand. They have troubled us by their singularities, grieved us by their impatience, despised us



by their obstinacy; all day long they are a source of annoyance to their brethren and a menace to the peace of the house. And nevertheless they have the impudence, by insistent prayer, to invite the God of all purity to take His repose in their sin-soiled hearts! No, your bed is not decorated with flowers, it is malodorous. Set about purifying your conscience from every defilement of anger, murmuring, quarrelling and envy. Make haste to exclude from your heart whatever you find there opposed to the peace of the community or to the obedience you owe your superiors. Then surround yourself with the flowers of every good action, every good desire, and perfume your soul with the sweet scent of the virtues. Whatsoever is true, whatsoever is chaste, whatsoever just, holy, amiable, of good repute, everything that appertains to virtue and discipline: meditate on all these things and cultivate them, too. You can then confidently invite the Spouse, and say to Him with perfect truth: 'Our bed is flower-strewn.' For then He cannot scent any odour save that of piety, peace, meekness, justice, obedience, holy joy, and humility. In this way, therefore, those who are still but novices in the spiritual life have to kiss the feet of the Lord, and to wash them with the tears of repentance. Those who are striving laboriously for the acquisition of the virtues kiss the hand of the Master and humbly invoke His aid. As a general rule, the 'kiss of the mouth' is reserved for the more advanced. Nevertheless, even these must adore tremblingly and make themselves quite little. And the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, will be careful to humble before exalting them, and to humble them still more after He has exalted them. For it is necessary that he who aspires to things so great should entertain a lowly opinion of himself. When, therefore, you see yourself humbled, that is a sign that grace is at hand, provided you know how to suffer everything for God's sake in silence and gladness of soul."<sup>16</sup>

Mystical contemplation, according to St. Teresa the

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<sup>16</sup> *Serm. in Cant.*, III, xxxiv, et xlvj,

Elder, "is a general banquet to which Our Lord invites all." It is, therefore, offered and, so to speak, promised to souls of good-will. God will give it to those who prepare themselves for it by an entire detachment, perfect humility, and the practice of all the other virtues, who, instead of coming to a standstill on the road, march onward with ever-new ardour towards the happy term of their aspirations. The Saint insists with special emphasis on "humility, humility, because it is by this virtue the Lord allows Himself to be vanquished, and accedes to all our desires." This prayer, no doubt, is supernatural. And God, Who remains always Master of His gifts, does not conduct all by the same way. However, "let a soul be humble and completely detached from every created object, in truth, I mean, and not in imagination which deceives many; and then, I feel certain, the Divine Master will bestow upon her not merely this grace, but also many more which will surpass her most ambitious aspirations."<sup>17</sup> St. John of the Cross "abounds in the same sense."<sup>18</sup>

As a matter of fact, however superficially we peruse the *Exordium of Cîteaux*, the Cistercian Menology, and the sermons of our holy father, St. Bernard, we shall soon be convinced that mysticism had a wonderful vogue in our Order during several centuries. The same is true of the Franciscans, of the Carmelites, of the Order of the Visitation, and indeed of all the Orders, but most particularly of the contemplative and enclosed religious families, so long as they persevered in the fervour of their prime. St. Teresa the Elder testifies that, in each of her houses, there was hardly a single religieuse practising ordinary discursive prayer; all, or almost all, enjoyed the gift of perfect contemplation.<sup>19</sup> St. Jane de Chantal avows that "the almost universal attraction of the daughters of the Visitation is to a very simple thought of the presence

<sup>17</sup> *Chemin*, xviii, xix, xx, xxvi.

<sup>18</sup> *I Nuit.*, i à viii.—*Vive flamme*, 3<sup>e</sup> str., 3<sup>e</sup> V., n. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Fond. de Médina*, c. iv.

of God and an entire abandonment,"<sup>20</sup> which obviously cannot be regarded as ordinary prayer. It must be acknowledged, though, that in this case the environment was ideal. But Scaramelli, after an experience of thirty years on the mission affirms that "in practically every place he met some souls whom God was conducting to high perfection by mystical ways."<sup>21</sup> In our own times, just as in past ages, God reserves to Himself many souls whom He favours with His most precious gifts. Such privileged ones are to be found even in the world; but much more frequently in religious communities, especially in cloistered communities. The majority of pious people never are nor can they be contemplatives: the crowd will always remain in the valley below; a goodly number may climb the first escarpments, but only the chosen few will mount to the summit. Consequently, although mystical prayer in its more sublime degrees must be of comparatively rare occurrence, yet in its early stages it is much commoner than is generally supposed; the more so because certain souls can be really contemplative, without either the confessors or themselves suspecting it. "We have here," says Bossuet, "a wonderful artifice of divine wisdom which conceals from souls its gifts to them and makes them long for the contemplation they already possess."<sup>22</sup>

But contemplation ought to be much more common. There are numbers of souls whom God would conduct to it, but they stop short on the road. Some of these might say with the sick man in the Gospel: *hominem non habeo* (John v, 7). I have no one to put me into the pond; and there are even those who would prevent my entrance. Others are kept back by excessive activity, agitation, and scruples. But the majority fail because they do not appreciate this precious pearl at its proper value; they refuse to do all that is required to obtain it; they do not

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<sup>20</sup> *Lettre à une supér.*

<sup>21</sup> *Direct. myst.*, Introd., c. i.

<sup>22</sup> *États d'or.*, Pref.

sufficiently practise self-denial, obedience and humility. This is the principal cause of the paucity of contemplatives.<sup>23</sup> St. Catherine of Bologna was quite safe in saying: "If to-day were found a Magdalen who loved God more ardently than the sister of Martha and Lazarus, God would love her more also, and would adorn her with more excellent gifts; if to-day there were a Francis who suffered more for Him than Francis of Assisi, he, too, would be favoured with more precious and more numerous endowments; and if we now had a Clare more pleasing to Him by her sanctity than was St. Clare, the treasure of graces bestowed on her would be proportionately more abundant." <sup>24</sup>

From what we have said, the following conclusions can be derived:

We are under no obligation to desire the passive forms of prayer; nor is God obliged to grant them, because they are neither perfection nor the only means conducting to perfection. We have a perfect right to desire and solicit them, even with importunity, on account of the superabundance of light and love and the increase of strength which they impart. It is very commendable to keep them in view, even if only as a far-off ideal, because they will thus serve as a happy stimulant to our spiritual activity.

We should dispose ourselves for them; because, in truth, the preparation which depends upon us is hardly more than the faithful discharge of our daily duties and the practice of Christian mortification—which no one who has his progress at heart will neglect.

Our desire must not be over-eager or chimerical. Everything has to come in its time. We have to support the painful combats of the purgative way, and the prolonged labours of the illuminative way, before we can enjoy the repose of the unitive way. It would be a deplorable illusion to neglect the struggles and the efforts to advance, and to hope to arrive at contemplation without first

<sup>23</sup> *Imitation*, I, iii, c. xxxi.

<sup>24</sup> *Acta sanct.*, 2 Mart; Vita 2<sup>a</sup>, n. 119.

accomplishing, zealously and thoroughly, all that is required as a preparation.

Our desire, however legitimate, must be tempered with humility and abandonment. An humble soul judges herself undeserving of a favour so sublime. She will, therefore, be content to be deprived of it for a long period, and perhaps for ever. By means of abandonment, we can make ourselves virtuously indifferent even with regard to so desirable a gift as contemplation. We want nothing except what God wills for us. In this way, we keep ourselves in our place and in peace; and, moreover, in case Divine Providence should refuse us the gift, we avoid sadness and discouragement.

We should desire progress in prayer, since it is a powerful means of sanctification. But much more should we desire progress in virtue, because that is our end. We should employ all our care and all our courage in purifying our interior house, and adorning it with every virtue; and then we should live there with God in silence and constant prayer. And although He is not bound to give His choicest gifts of contemplation to any person, He can never suffer Himself to be overcome in generosity. But even should He refuse us such favours in order to sanctify us in some other way, there will always remain for us, as the reward of our efforts, an abundant increase of grace and glory. And is not that the essential thing?

## ARTICLE II.—THE VARIETIES OF MYSTICAL CONTEMPLATION

Let us suppose now that God actually endows us with the gift of contemplation. It comprises a wonderful variety of ways, and He reserves to Himself the choice of the one we have to follow.

Contemplation must always be a prayer of simple, loving attention to God and the things of God. Its essence can be completely expressed in these two words: looking and loving. The soul looks at God and she loves Him.

But in the beginning there is a transitional period, during which at one time we practise discursive prayer and at another contemplation. We have also to distinguish active contemplation from passive. In the former, it seems as if the soul *of her own free choice* abandons her reasonings and simplifies her affections; whereas in the latter she is clearly conscious that the light and love which invade her are *not the fruit of her own efforts*, but have been infused into her by God. Now, He communicates these graces as He wills. He may give more light than love, and our prayer will be cherubic; or He may give more love than light, and our prayer will be seraphic. Some will feel attracted to contemplate His divine attributes, or the adorable Trinity; but He will incline the majority to choose as the subject of their contemplation the Sacred Humanity, the Holy Infancy, the Passion, the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Sacrament, etc. God is the Master, and it is for Him to assign to each of us our special rôle and service. The mystical action will sometimes produce in the soul a silence full of admiration and love, sometimes effusions of tenderness or violent transports. Now it will pour in light and love in torrents, and now in lesser streams or even drop by drop, according to the disposition of the soul, and also according as God designs either to inflame her or to purify her further. In short, for manifold reasons, contemplation will assume a variety of forms and undergo numerous changes. And all this will demand from us continual self-denial and filial abandonment.

Let us pause here to examine somewhat more in detail one of these very trying variations. Sometimes our contemplation will be full of delight, but far oftener it will be arid or at best but little consoling.

In order to understand this point of doctrine, let us observe with Le Gaudier "that there are some acts essential to contemplation, namely, in the intellect a simple attention without any reflection or reasoning, and in the will the love of friendship, which is the most excellent of all acts, and the source, form, and end of contemplation.

But there are other acts which complete or integrate it, so to speak, such as admiration and devotion accompanied with an ineffable delight.”<sup>25</sup> Undoubtedly, these latter give an accidental perfection to mystical prayer, in so far as they contribute to it a splendour of beauty, a delicious sweetness, and even additional force. Without them, nevertheless, contemplation would have all its essential constituents. And God, Who governs us with as much wisdom as love, has recourse sometimes to the sweet, sometimes to the dry and purifying contemplation, according to the particular effect of grace which He designs to produce in us.

Does He aim at detaching a soul from earthly things and uniting her strongly to Himself? He will deluge her with light and love. Plunged in God, of Whose presence and action she is delightfully conscious, inflamed with the holy ardours of unitive love, fascinated by the divine beauty and goodness, and by the tenderness of a Lord so great and holy for His miserable creature: she becomes instantly silent and contemplates Him in a hush of admiration; she envelops her Well-Beloved with a long, lingering look wherein jostle each other the emotions of astonishment, joy, and love, which hold her captive; she enjoys her God in a union full of peace and sweetness, like St. John reposing on the bosom of his beloved Master. She now loves with all her heart, without expressing her love. But her silence speaks of it quite audibly. Her whole being concentrated in the burning gaze of her eyes, the flow of her tears, her adoring attitude, the dispositions of her heart, the very immobility produced by over-powering emotion: all loudly proclaim the love that consumes her. Or, if grace prompts to this, she eases her heart in effusions of tenderness, without violence or transports, in the most delightful intimacy of love. Or it may be that love and joy abound to such a degree that she can no longer contain them. Lost in love and happiness, intoxicated with God, she breaks out into pious transports;

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<sup>25</sup> *De perf. vite spirit.*, P. II, sect. iii, c. iii.

she abandons herself to the violence of her tender emotions, to the impetuosity of her heart; she pours out a flood of ardent sentiments, delirious expressions, holy follies. But she endeavours at the same time to hide the secret of the King from indiscreet observers. Nor is it for once only and in a passing way that God thus lowers Himself to our littleness and raises us to such divine intimacies. Over and over again, and for a long time on each occasion, He will take this soul into His arms, caress her on His knees, and press her to His heart of a Father as the child of His love.

Is it necessary to multiply all kinds of arguments to prove to this soul that she loves and that she is loved much more fondly in return? That God is unspeakably good and designs to make her very happy? Has she not actually felt the tenderness of His embrace? She knows now, by a sweet experience, the heart of her most affectionate of fathers, of her adorable Spouse. It no longer costs her any trouble or effort to place all her confidence in Him. She abandons to His care without difficulty all that is dearest to her: her life, her death, her eternity. She implores Him to take possession of her heart and will, to guard and govern them henceforth and for ever. What would she not do for Him now? It is the season of beautiful sunshine and golden harvests. Let her be careful to follow with docility the action of God in prayer, to repay Him with a just return by redoubling her fidelity, to refuse Him nothing that He may be pleased to demand. This is the time for her to conquer self with less trouble and more energy; sacrifice is now so easy; indeed, it has become a veritable joy. Let her never forget to seek the God of consolations rather than the consolations of God, and to entrench herself in the consciousness of her misery in proportion as He exalts her by His mercy. And in the time of prosperity let her prepare for adversity. For not always will contemplative prayer bring the vivid admiration which holds the mind in a happy stupor, the ardour of love which throws the will into transports, or



the joy which deluges the soul and the senses. Seldom, indeed, does the mystical action attain this maximum of intensity. Most frequently, it manifests itself with a medium or a low degree of strength; and consequently the prayer will be performed in a state between consolation and dryness, or even in a monotonous and trying aridity.

Why these continual variations? Because the soul is not yet thoroughly purified, nor sufficiently detached from the senses. She must disengage herself more completely from all creatures, and also become less dependent on her own sensible operations. She is indeed striving towards these ends by means of Christian mortification. But it is necessary that God should help her with His powerful hand. He has already done so by the ardours of delightful contemplation. That, however, is not enough. Under a deluge of light and love, could we discover beyond a doubt our misery and our poverty? Perhaps just there would be found the most delicate food of pride and the instinct for pleasure, and the old man would continue to live in us. But God is determined to reduce him by restricted diet or, if necessary, by a starvation *régime*. He withdraws from the soul the customary meditations in which she used to experience such delight, the abundance of her pious reflections, the variety of her affections, and the sweet caresses of divine love. As a substitute, He gives her a little contemplation, but arid and purifying, in which He dispenses to her light and love in meagerest measure, with torturing parsimony. He gives her as much of these graces as is necessary to make her turn towards Him, to seek Him, and to find no contentment anywhere but in His presence; but not enough to enable her to take hold of Him with a delicious sense of possession. This is true mystical contemplation, but it consists in an anxious seeking, an aching want, an unsatisfied hunger. From time to time, God allows Himself to be glimpsed, and immediately the soul feels the holy ardours and joys of the happier contemplation. But very quickly, and perhaps for a long period, He leads

her back again into this monotonous and desolate night of the senses. Again and again, as often and for as long as He deems necessary, He thus condemns her to exile. And, to give the *coup de grace* to self-love, He has yet in reserve for her the night of the spirit, which is far more trying still.

But has she cause for complaint? Surely no! Her condition is a grace, though austere and crucifying, and, if one may judge by the ordinary course of Providence, a very necessary grace! Let her endeavour to understand the designs of God, and to conform herself thereto with confidence and generosity. Only in appearance has she been repulsed. Forsaken in her hunger of mind, in her dryness of heart, in her oft-renewed temptations, obliged to bring home to herself by bitter experience her impotence and misery; she becomes little in her own eyes, and will end by making herself humble and submissive before God and men. Continually deprived of the sweetnesss which she loved not wisely but too well, she learns at last to do without them, and to serve her good Master at her own expense. And now, upon the ruins of self-love, the love of God elevates itself, and all the other virtues, too. From this very state of aridity they derive an increase of strength, of merit, and of splendour. For we practise faith, hope, charity, obedience and abandonment, whilst God conceals His love from us and exhibits nothing to our view but His holy severity. Consequently, there is here a gold-mine to be exploited for the purification of our souls and our progress in virtue: provided we persevere courageously in prayer and do not allow the trials to depress us.

Briefly, as well the arid as the savoury type of contemplation has its own providential function to fulfil, and both secure to the faithful soul some very precious advantages: the one has for its direct end to make us die to ourselves, the other to make us live to God; the one possesses a marvellous power for the destruction of self-love, the other for enkindling the love of God. But we

can impede the action of the former by want of courage, and the action of the latter by want of humility and self-denial. Which of the two is the more necessary for us? Should we make a good or a bad use of the one and the other? Undoubtedly, we are entitled to have a preference, and to express it to God with simplicity and filial confidence. But exposed as we are to self-deception in a matter of such importance, which depends besides on the divine good-pleasure, is it not the part of prudence to leave the choice in the hands of God, and to be ready to discharge our duty by accepting beforehand His decision, whatever it may be?

The saints themselves did not all practise the same form of prayer, but all practised this filial abandonment and followed with docility the guidance of grace.

Let us hear St. Jane de Chantal speaking of her spiritual father: "He once told me that he did not mind whether he was in consolation or desolation. When Our Lord gave him sentiments of devotion, he received them with simplicity; if He withheld them, he thought no more of the matter. Nevertheless, it is true that, as a rule, he enjoyed great interior consolation, which manifested itself in his countenance. Several years ago he confided to me that he experienced no sensible relish in prayer, and that God worked in him by means of spiritual illuminations and affections, infused into the superior part of his soul, so that the inferior part had no share in them. He received them simply, with profound reverence and humility. For it was his practice to keep himself very humble and little and utterly abased before the Divine Majesty, yet with all the reverential confidence of a loving and beloved child." <sup>26</sup>

St. Jane de Chantal herself practised a passive prayer of simple self-surrender to God, of total abandonment, an uninterrupted *fiat voluntas tua*. It consisted of a very simple attention to God and to her own nothingness, with an entire abandonment to the divine good-pleasure,

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<sup>26</sup> St. Fr. de Sales, *Vie*, app., lettre de Ste. J. de Chantal.

and with no attempt to elicit acts either of the understanding or of the will—that is to say, methodic, discursive or sensible acts. “Our Lord infused into her soul the sentiments she required, and then illuminated her most perfectly with regard to everything needful, and a thousand times better than she could have been by any reasonings or imaginations of her own.” Nevertheless, she suffered much in a state so simple and so passive, on account of the ardour of her temperament and the novelty of the way. It was all a puzzle to her and a source of anxiety. But her holy director reassured her, pointing out that “the quietude where the will acts only by a simple acquiescence in the divine good-pleasure is a supremely excellent quietude, in as much as it is immune from all manner of self-seeking.” And in order that his spiritual daughter might fearlessly follow the movement of grace, “consoling herself with having no consolation except the want of all consolation,” the holy Doctor encouraged her with his celebrated parable: “Suppose a statue, placed in a niche in the centre of a hall, had the powers of reason and speech, and suppose someone asked it: ‘Why are you here?’ It would answer: ‘Because the sculptor, my master, placed me here.’ ‘And why do you not move away?’ ‘Because he wants me to remain just here, immovable.’ ‘But what purpose do you serve here? What do you gain by continuing here as a fixture?’ ‘It is not for my own benefit I am here, but to serve and obey the will of my master.’ ‘But you cannot see him.’ ‘No, but he can see me, and it pleases him to know that I remain just where he has put me.’ ‘But would you not like to have the power of movement, in order to approach nearer to him?’ ‘No, not unless he commanded me to do so.’ ‘Have you, then, no desires at all?’ ‘No, because I am where my master has placed me, and his good-pleasure is the only contentment of my being.’ O, my daughter, how excellent a prayer it is, just to keep oneself conformed to the will and good-pleasure of God!” However, “in this passive state, St. Jane did

not abstain from activity at certain times, when God suspended His own operation, or when grace inspired her thereto. But always her acts were short, humble, and loving." The direction given her by St. Francis was very wise and her occupation very fruitful. "For after a year or two of such passive prayer, Mother de Chantal found herself possessed of lights hitherto unknown to her, and manifested wonderfully profound sentiments regarding God, herself, and all creatures, as well as an ardour of zeal, an abandonment to the divine will, a contempt for all earthly objects, and a thirst for humiliations which astonished everyone." <sup>27</sup>

Our Lord once said to St. Margaret Mary: "Know, My child, that the prayer of submission and sacrifice is more agreeable to Me than contemplation." And this worthy daughter of St. Jane de Chantal was accustomed to say that "interior pains accepted with love resembled a purifying fire which insensibly consumes in the soul whatever is displeasing to the Divine Spouse. Those who have the experience will avow that they thus make very much progress without suspecting it. Hence, if offered the choice of consolation or suffering, a faithful soul should not hesitate a moment, but should embrace the cross of our Divine Master, even though it brought us no other benefit than that of conforming us to our crucified Spouse." <sup>28</sup>

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, speaking of her retreat for profession, wrote: "Far from enjoying consolation, the most absolute aridity, almost abandonment, was my portion. Jesus slept, *as always*, in my little boat. . . . I don't believe He will ever awake before the long retreat of eternity. But instead of grief, this causes me the greatest satisfaction. I should attribute my aridity to my want of fervour and fidelity; I ought to feel disconsolate at the remembrance of the many times I fell asleep during

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<sup>27</sup> Bougaud, *Hist. de Ste. Chantal*, c. xviii; St. Fr. de Sales, *Am. de Dieu*, I, vi, c. xi; *Lettre*, 454.

<sup>28</sup> Gauthey, *Vie*, Nos. 33-8.

prayer and thanksgiving. All the same, I do not feel disconsolate. I just recall to mind that little children please their parents as much when they are asleep as when they are awake." It was her childlike confidence and humility that reassured her. Nevertheless, she faithfully employed the requisite means to ensure success in prayer, and succeeded so well that her prayer became continual. Further on, she speaks of the terrible trial through which God made her pass. "No doubt, you regard me as one deluged with consolations, a soul for whom the veil of faith has been almost rent. The truth is, however, that it is no longer a veil for me; it is rather a wall which rises to heaven and shuts out from my view the stars of the firmament. When I sing in choir of the happiness of heaven, I experience no joyous emotions; for I just sing that which I will to believe. . . . The Lord laid this heavy cross upon my shoulders only at the time when He saw I could carry it; any sooner, it would, I fear, have plunged me in discouragement. But now it produces only the one effect of purifying my aspirations for my heavenly homeland of every sentiment of natural pleasure." <sup>29</sup>

What we have been saying applies particularly to obscure and general contemplation. There is another form which is distinct and definite, and consists especially in visions, revelations, interior locutions, etc. Here, if anywhere, we have to maintain ourselves in a holy indifference. We should even desire that God would conduct us by another way.

Favours of the kind just mentioned do not necessarily imply sanctity. Balaam received the gift of prophecy, as did likewise Saul and Judas. The last-named even worked miracles. Mere children have had visions, as at La Salette, Lourdes, and Pontmain. On the other hand, many of the saints seem never to have been favoured in this way. In our own time, whilst God has lavished such graces on Gemma Galgani and a number of others, He has withheld them absolutely or nearly so from such holy

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<sup>29</sup> *Histoire*, cc. viii et ix.

souls as St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, and Sister Celine of the Presentation. These privileges, therefore, are neither sanctity nor a certain sign of sanctity. St. Teresa the Elder declares with good reason: "The soul does not merit more glory through being frequently favoured with them. . . . Our Lord does not make our merits to depend on such graces, since there are many holy persons who have never received them, whereas they have been bestowed on some others not at all distinguished for sanctity."<sup>30</sup>

Neither are they a necessary means for attaining to perfection. St. Teresa the Elder, nevertheless, who was richly endowed with them, highly extols their beneficent efficacy. "We ought to have a great esteem for them," she writes. "I have hardly ever had any visions that did not leave me an increase of virtue. One single word of those I am accustomed to hear, one vision, an ecstasy that endures not longer than it takes to recite an *Ave Maria*, is enough to establish my soul in perfect peace, to restore even the health of my body, to fill my intellect with light, and to bring back the vigour and the desires which I usually have. I recall what I have been; I realise that I was walking in the way of perdition; and I see that in a short space of time these favours have wrought such a change in me that I scarcely recognise myself."<sup>31</sup> It would then be a mistake to reject all graces of this kind on principle or from prejudice: it would be blocking up the path against the Holy Spirit, supposing He desired to conduct us to sanctity by this way.

But if some of these extraordinary phenomena are good and excellent because they come from God, there are others, caused by the artifice of the demon or the play of the imagination, of which the opposite must be said. Illusions are easier here than anywhere else in the spiritual life. Even some canonised saints were not always secure from them. Witness St. Catherine of Bologna. For

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<sup>30</sup> *Château*, 6<sup>e</sup> dem., c. ix.

<sup>31</sup> *Vie*, c. xxviii, et *Relation*, i.

a whole year, at the beginning of her religious life, she allowed herself to be imposed upon by the demon, who appeared to her under the form of Jesus crucified or of the Blessed Virgin. We must admit that she exposed herself to the cheat by her presumption. St. Teresa the Elder warns us that he who ventures to desire such favours "is already deceived, or in great danger of deception, because the demon will avail of the least opening to set a thousand snares for us, and also because an ardent desire carries away the imagination, so that we easily fancy we hear and see that which we desire to hear and see." On the contrary, "provided a soul is resolved not to let herself be imposed upon, and walks in humility and simplicity, it seems to me impossible that she should be deceived."<sup>32</sup> However, it is here a matter of the most urgent necessity to pray, to reflect, to consult, and to follow all the prescriptions of a rigorous prudence.

Everybody knows with what earnestness St. John of the Cross warns his readers to distrust visions, revelations and interior locutions, to resist them, and to have nothing to do with them. St. Teresa expresses a more moderate opinion. "There is always reason for fear in such things," she says, "so long as one has not certainty that they come from the Spirit of God. Hence I say that, in the beginning, the wisest course is always to resist them. If God is their Author, the humility of the soul in refusing the divine favours will only help to dispose her the better for receiving them, and the more she puts them to the test the more they will increase. But we should not unduly restrain or disquiet the recipients of such favours." Speaking in particular of apparitions of Our Lord, she says: "You should never solicit them, or even desire to be conducted by this way. It is, undoubtedly, a good way, and you should have a great esteem and respect for it. But to pray for it or wish for it is not expedient." The Saint completes her thought by a recommendation to holy abandonment. "For all we can tell, we shall suffer a loss

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<sup>32</sup> *Vie*, xxviii; *Château*, 6<sup>e</sup> dem., c. ix.



there where we hope to make a profit. Is it not, then, a strange want of prudence to desire to choose our own way without being certain whether it is a sure way, instead of abandoning ourselves to the guidance of Our Lord Who knows us infinitely better than we know ourselves; so that He may conduct us by the way which is most expedient for us, and that His holy will may be done in all things?"<sup>33</sup> Therefore, prudent reserve and filial abandonment. This conclusion of the Saint shall also be ours. None other harmonises so well with the precept of the Holy Spirit: "Despise not prophecies, but prove all things: hold fast that which is good" (I *Thes.* v, 20-21).

Besides, and we should never forget it, the essential point is not that our prayer is active or passive, silent or otherwise, sweet or arid, obscure or distinct, but that it yields us abundant fruits of mortification, obedience and humility; and that it makes us advance in every virtue, especially in love, confidence, and holy abandonment. And precisely those vicissitudes, of which we have been speaking, are wonderfully well qualified to render the soul pliable and docile in God's hands, whilst at the same time preserving to her the treasure of her humility.

#### ARTICLE III.—PROGRESS IN CONTEMPLATION AND PROGRESS IN VIRTUE

It had been our hope to advance, to advance still further, to keep always advancing in the mystical ways. But the months and the years have gone by, and we find we have made little if any progress; perhaps it even seems to us that we have fallen back. This is doubtless a heavy trial, so heavy that we are tempted to lose courage and possibly to abandon our holy undertaking. But we deceive ourselves.

The desire to advance in the ways of mysticism is in itself perfectly lawful, and we have a right to express it to

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<sup>33</sup> *Château*, 6<sup>e</sup> dem., cc. iii et ix.

God in confident and filial prayer. Are we not actuated by the thought that our communings with Him, in proportion as they become more intimate, will bring us an increase of light and strength, will reinforce the union of love, and render more perfect our practice of virtue?

But it is necessary to temper this desire with a filial abandonment. God wills to remain Master of the gifts which He designs to bestow upon us. The time and the measure of them He reserves to Himself, in order to keep us in dependence and humility. He does not raise all souls of good-will to mystical contemplation. Those whom He does raise are not all destined for the same degree of prayer, just as they are not all destined for the same degree of perfection. When He has begun to lavish gifts on us, we never know whether He wills to grant us greater favours, to leave us those He has already given, or to take them back. Certain mystical graces are given only for a time; God then withdraws them, even without any fault on our part. He might act in a similar manner with regard to the graces of prayer. We have reason to hope, however, that He will continue and constantly increase them, if we are faithful. Still, He is the Master. He allows us to remain in ignorance of His intentions, or rather He carefully conceals them from our knowledge. What, then, are we to do? Let us never venture to leave the quietude and the night of the senses; let us show ourselves satisfied with the grace God has granted us: our actual state is very beautiful, very enviable, if compared with that of so many others. Let us continue to praise the Lord Who has condescended to prevent us with the blessings of His sweetness, and let us occupy ourselves exclusively with the task of tending the precious seed He has sown in us. Such gratitude and fidelity cannot fail to rejoice the heart and to open the hand of our good Father, whilst ingratitude and negligence would hurt Him in the most sensitive part and cause Him to repent of His bounty.

The desire referred to should be patient, and should

know how to await the moment of grace. According to the teaching of all masters of the spiritual life, the degrees of passive contemplation are rather stations, periods, or spiritual ages. As a general rule, it is necessary to make a long sojourn in each of them before passing on to the next. God has so willed it, to the end that the different states of prayer might have ample time to produce their proper effects. We should, therefore, be much more intent on deriving from our present degree its full benefit than on mounting to the one above it. Moreover, is not progress in virtue the principal fruit we expect to gather from these mystical graces, and the surest means, if such be the good-pleasure of God, to prepare ourselves for further ascensions?

And above all, this desire should be humble and vigilant. If we do not mount to loftier heights, and with greater rapidity, the fault is generally found in our lack of zeal in disposing ourselves and corresponding. This is the view of St. Teresa the Elder. "There are very many souls," she writes, "who arrive at this state (of quietude; she is speaking of her own communities, which were very fervent and holily governed). But very few of them mount higher, for what reason I know not. Most certainly the fault is not on the side of God. As for Him, when He has once granted so sublime a favour, He will never cease, at least so I think, from pouring out additional and still more sublime gifts, unless we by our infidelities oblige Him. . . . Great is my grief when, out of so many who have come thus far and should all proceed further, I see such a small number who actually do so that I am positively ashamed to speak of it."<sup>34</sup> St. Francis de Sales adopts this opinion of St. Teresa, and adds: "Let us, therefore, Theotime, be very attentive to our advancement in the love we owe to God, for the love which He bears us can never fail."<sup>35</sup> This is very encouraging doctrine. But it also shows us our

<sup>34</sup> *Château*, dem., iv, c. iii, et *Vie*, c. xv.

<sup>35</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, ii, c. xi

responsibilities. So far from feeling proud of having attained to the prayer of quiet, we should rather ask ourselves with fear why we have not advanced further. And if it seems to us that we are hardly making any progress at all, an humble self-scrutiny is always indicated.

If we have through our own fault stopped the flow of divine favours, let us at once remove the cause of the evil. If our conscience can find nothing to reproach us with, let us adore with humble confidence the holy will of God. And whilst awaiting the moment of His Providence, let us endeavour with redoubled zeal to sanctify the trial and to prepare ourselves for new graces. So long as we are faithful to this practice, our state of prayer may indeed appear at a standstill; but in reality our faith is growing more luminous and all the virtues are gathering strength, particularly love, confidence, and abandonment. What more do we want? Is not such progress the one thing necessary, essential? Here we have all the benefit which we should expect from advancement in the mystical ways. But if we failed with regard to this, what advantage would it be to us to have practised the most sublime form of prayer, full of lights, and ardours, and transports? And on the other hand if, as we suppose, we have actually attained the essential end of all prayer, what matters it that we have arrived there by a more common way, and even with the prolonged deprivation of these lights, ardours, and ravishments?

Let us never forget it: real and solid progress, that which is the end of divine grace and our co-operation, that which we have to desire in an absolute manner, is progress in all the virtues, especially in charity which is their queen. Perhaps it will not be a waste of time if we clarify our thought a little. Love has its seat in the will. Often, but not always, it overflows thence upon the inferior faculties. It thus becomes visible and palpable, and occasionally will rise into veritable transports. The more sensible it is, the more we feel its force, and the more desirable it appears to us. It is then complete, and

its power is increasing, because all our faculties concentrate their energies in it. Nevertheless, it is not such brilliant lights, or such holy intoxication, or such effervescent ardour, that should form the principal object of our desires. For it is quite possible, and sometimes actually the case, that this love is more sensible than spiritual, and consequently its splendour surpasses its worth. On the other hand, love can remain purely spiritual, without exercising any influence on the sensitive faculties. In that case it will be almost imperceptible, although at the same time full of vitality and vigour. It is by its fruits, not by its blossoms, that love must be estimated : works are its proof and its true measure. Solid and deep is the love that powerfully unites our wills to the will of God ; it is perfect when it leads us to identify our wills with His, so that whatever He wills we also will, and whatever He does not will, neither do we. This implies universal detachment and death to self.

Such is the end we are obliged to aim at. Progress in contemplation is only a means of attaining thereto. It is not even a necessary means, nor is it of itself sufficient.

“ Certain religieuses,” says St. Alphonsus, “ have been reading works on mysticism ; and see them now, all at once, full of ardour for the extraordinary union which the authors call passive. I should prefer to find them eager for the active union, that is to say, for perfect conformity to the divine will, in which, as St. Teresa assures us, consists the real union of the soul with God. Therefore she adds, with reference to souls favoured with the active union only : ‘ Perhaps these have more merit, because they need more personal exertion, and God treats them as souls strong in virtue.’ It is indubitable that without infused contemplation, and with the assistance of God’s ordinary grace, we can by our own successful efforts annihilate self-love and completely conform our wills to the divine will. Therefore we ought only to desire and pray that God would accomplish His will

in us. Herein consists all sanctity.”<sup>36</sup> According to St. Alphonsus, there is, then, only one object to be striven for: the perfect conformity of our wills with the holy will of God. But to this object there are two roads, active union and passive. Consequently, we should pray for perfect conformity—holy abandonment—and that alone, in an absolute manner. With regard to the choice of ways and means, it belongs to God to select these for us as best pleases Him. Still, it is perfectly lawful to desire the mystical forms of prayer, and to pray for progress in them, if such be the good-pleasure of God. The traditional teaching is explicit on this point. And even St. Alphonsus, who is here somewhat singular, allows at least that if we possess the germ of these graces we have a right to ask for its development.

Who does not know the esteem and love of St. Teresa the Elder for the mystical forms of prayer? The more sublime and frequent they are, the more she eulogises their wonderful efficacy, in order to give us a right appreciation of them, to make us desire them as an inestimable treasure, and to urge us to acquire them, God willing, whatever the cost. She nowhere excludes from this desire and effort either the full union or the ecstatic union, or even the spiritual marriage. And we could cite many passages from her works in support of the view that she did not intend them excluded. But in spite of the magnificent encomiums which she pronounces on the prayer of union, she nevertheless prefers the union of the will, as one prefers the goal to the way, the fruit to the flower. It is “this union of will that she made the object of her life-long desire and constantly implored of Our Lord.” The prayer of union is the shortest road, the most rapid and powerful conveyance to that end. But it is only one of the ways, not the goal itself. “I repeat it,” she says, “our true treasure is a profound humility, a great spirit of mortification, and perfect obedience which, seeing God Himself in our superiors, submits to every-

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<sup>36</sup> *Relig. sanct.*, c. xiv.

thing which they command. . . . Here we have a more certain sign of progress than can be found in the delights of prayer, in the transports, visions, and other favours of this kind which God confers on souls as He pleases." <sup>37</sup>

St. Philip Neri expressed the same opinion in these words: "Obedience, patience, and humility are of more value to nuns than any ecstasies." <sup>38</sup>

Sts. Teresa, Philip and Alphonsus knew from long personal experience the inestimable value of full union and ecstasy. Far from them, therefore, the culpable ingratitude which refuses to recognise the gifts of God, and the not less culpable aberration which depreciates them, which prejudices souls against them, and presumes to lecture the Holy Ghost. They simply desired to put us on our guard against possible illusions. And the worst illusion of all would undoubtedly be to mistake mystical favours for sanctity itself. These are very precious graces when they come from God. But it remains for us to employ them to best advantage for the improvement of our conduct, which should rise to the level of our prayer.

Thus, St. Francis de Sales could say with all truth that if a person enjoyed transports in prayer, but had no ecstasies in his daily conduct, that is to say, if he did not rise above worldly ambitions and natural desires and inclinations by means of self-denial, simplicity and humility, and especially by constant charity, "all his ravishments would be extremely doubtful and dangerous; they would be better calculated to win the admiration of men than to sanctify souls; they would be only the amusements and impostures of the evil spirit. Happy they who live lives that are superhuman, ecstatic, superior to natural instincts, although they may never have been ravished above themselves in prayer! There are many saints in heaven who never experienced the raptures and ecstasies of contemplation. . . . But never has there been a saint who did not experience the raptures and ecstasies

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<sup>37</sup> *Chemin*, c. xix; *Vie et Château*, passim.

<sup>38</sup> Comtesse d'Orves, *St. Ph. de Néri*, c. xxvii.

of conduct, by rising above himself and his natural inclinations." <sup>39</sup>

We can estimate from this the value of the formulas : As the prayer, so the perfection ; or again : As the perfection, so the prayer. They contain a nucleus of truth. For usually our progress in prayer is measured by our progress in the spiritual life ; and, reciprocally, our progress in the spiritual life is powerfully assisted by our progress in prayer. But we should understand these formulas in too absolute and in a very exaggerated sense, were we to suppose that prayer and the spiritual life *always* and *rigorously* advance *pari passu*. It is not true, at least with regard to mystical prayer. This is a grace which God is never obliged to bestow on anyone, no matter how faithful. He grants it to whom He pleases and in what measure He pleases. It is a wonderfully effective instrument, but one must know how to use it. Let us imagine several souls with exactly the same degree of preparation and fidelity in correspondence : God, if He so wills, may refuse His mystical graces to some and bestow them on others. Hence, by the presence or absence of these gifts alone we cannot judge of their relative perfection. St. Joseph of Cupertino had very frequent ecstasies. Was he therefore a greater saint than St. Francis de Sales or St. Vincent de Paul, who were not so highly privileged ? In recent years God lavished various mystical gifts upon Gemma Galgani and many other holy persons. But He did not manifest the same liberality in the case of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity or St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Are we then to suppose the latter inferior in sanctity to the former ? God alone can judge of that. But at all events everyone knows that St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus has become the great wonder-worker of our age, and her life remains the ideal of true religious perfection.

All that we have been saying on the subject of mystical contemplation can be summed up in the few words where-

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<sup>39</sup> *Am. de Dieu*, I, vii, cc. vi et vii.



with we concluded the *Voies de l'Oraison mentale*. "The best prayer is not the prayer that is sweetest, but the prayer that is most fruitful; it is not that which elevates us either in the common or the mystical ways, but that which makes us humble, detached, obedient, generous, and faithful to all our duties. Assuredly, we have a very high esteem for contemplation, provided, however, that it unites our wills to the will of God, that it transforms our lives, or at least makes us advance in virtue. Consequently, we should desire to make progress in prayer only as a means to advancement in perfection. And instead of indulging our curiosity by seeking to discover at what degree our communings with God have arrived, we should rather examine if we have drawn from them all the fruit they are capable of yielding, for the extinction of self and the development of the divine life of grace in our souls."

#### ARTICLE IV.—LETTING GOD ACT IN THE MYSTICAL WAYS

"Let God act," is an expression much in use these days. It embodies a truth. But we must not take it too literally, or we shall open the door to Semi-Quietism. When explaining the idea of holy abandonment, we pointed out, with an abundance of evidence to support us, that it excludes neither foresight nor personal effort. Therefore it cannot be truly described as just "letting God act," whether with regard to the common or the mystical ways. The common way is active and the mystical passive. The divine action, consequently, will differ as between the two. Nevertheless, the formula "let God act" does not express all our duties in either the one or the other.

In the common way, the action of God adapts itself to our natural processes. It leaves to us the choice and the management of our operations. It puts itself, so to speak, at our service. Such is the marvellous condescension of

our heavenly Father ! Let us at first confine ourselves to prayer, and let us take as an example meditation. Since there is question of a supernatural work, it is necessary that divine grace should anticipate us and co-operate with us in each one of our acts, for without it we can do nothing. But it leaves it to us to determine freely the time, the place, and the subject of our prayer. It also leaves to us the management of it, in the sense that we can, at our pleasure, choose our considerations and affections, assign them whatever place, extension, and variety we please, and form resolutions according to our preference. God works with us and in us ; but He accommodates Himself to our human manner of operating, and remains hidden. It is true, He will dispose of us according to His good-pleasure ; and we shall find ourselves, consequently, in aridity or consolation, in calm or in combat, in peace or in interior pain. Here, no doubt, the principle : “ let God act,” has its place, but there is also ample scope for our own free activity.

Conditions change when we enter upon the mystical ways. Let us take the state of quiet as an example. God, acting through the gifts of the Holy Ghost, does not hide Himself so much. Ordinarily, He makes His presence and His action felt. He intervenes, according to His good-pleasure, in choir, during spiritual reading, at manual work, at whatever time and in whatever place He judges opportune, and not always when we expect Him. He no longer accommodates Himself to our natural activities ; rather, in a certain sense, He imposes His own upon us. Whenever it pleases Him, He takes the initiative and assumes the management of our prayer. He binds up the imagination, the memory, and the understanding, in order to prevent developed considerations, methodic and discursive, varied and complex affections, and to train us gradually to a simple, loving attention. He Himself produces the light and the love. He infuses them in torrents, in more meagre measure, or drop by drop ; intensifies or relaxes them, as He pleases. He assigns

them for object either His own divine attributes, or the Passion, or the Holy Infancy, or whatever else He deems proper. He excites in our souls the silence of admiration, or the transports of love, or the tranquil colloquies; or He may even reduce us to the trying aridity of a boundless desert. It is not in our power to intensify or moderate His action, or to detain Him or bring Him back against His will when He has decided to withdraw. He is the Master, and He makes us realise the fact. But His intervention will always be the effect of His merciful love and infallible wisdom.

Nevertheless, He leaves us, as a general rule, the facility for making pious lectures, and even of finding abundant considerations for the benefit of our brethren. Apart from the impotence for meditation which may become absolute, the mystical influence in the state of quiet does not entirely fetter our faculties. We have always the power to accept or reject it, to adopt the subject of prayer it proposes or to take another instead, to confine ourselves to the occupations it urges upon us or to add to them others of our own choice, such as affections, petitions, etc. In a word, the state of quiet is a mixture of active and passive contemplation, or, in the language of St. Teresa the Elder, "the natural is here intermingled with the supernatural."<sup>40</sup> Consequently, here also there is room enough for "letting God act," and for our own personal activity.

The passivity of the soul will be much more pronounced in full union and ecstasy. She will scarcely have any activity in the former, and none at all in the latter, when they have reached their highest development. But at this stage of the spiritual life, our prayer does not always mount to its maximum intensity. Far from it. Besides, it rises and falls, even during the course of the same exercise. For the most part, therefore, it will remain in simple quietude or in passive purifications. Briefly, contemplation is very, very seldom entirely passive. And, as a consequence, there will always be room for giving

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<sup>40</sup> *Château*, 4<sup>e</sup> dem., c. iii.

God a free hand, and very generally for our own activity also, in greater or lesser degree. But as the divine action is the principal, ours must be kept in due subordination to it, must be harmonised and commingled with it.

This "letting God act," needless to say, does not—if properly understood—signify the purely passive state of the field which receives with uniform inertia the dew of heaven or the rays of the sun. It rather expresses the attitude of a soul, intelligent and free, who, understanding the divine benefit, presents herself with whole-hearted desire to receive it and to lose no smallest fragment of it. She does not confine herself to giving her consent, to abstaining from active resistance and from doing anything that might be an obstacle: in addition to this, she presents her mind, her heart, and her will, that all may be made subject to the dominion of grace. Consequently, so long as the mystical influence makes itself felt, she is on the watch to repel distractions and all such occupations, if any should intrude, as are incompatible with her prayer. Hence, she avoids seeking, and even refuses, when they spontaneously suggest themselves, prolonged considerations, varied and complex affections, and everything more qualified to extinguish than to strengthen the delicate flame. But the divine action she receives with reverence and submission, with confidence and gratitude, and adapts herself thereto as perfectly as she can. She accepts it just as it is offered, whether weak or strong, silent or prayerful, and without seeking any other subject. If the infused occupation appears to her sufficient, she limits herself to the contemplation of God in an amorous silence, or to the production of pious affections, following the motions of the Holy Spirit. Should this occupation be too weak, she endeavours to reinforce it by means of some pious affections conformable to the divine action. In short, she puts herself with loving reverence at the disposal of grace. But when the mystical influence has ceased to make itself felt, the soul gives herself up to prayer, of her own determination and according to her

choice, by the method most likely to prove successful. She now supplies for that which she has not been able to do in the passive prayer; she devotes herself to pious reading, and produces the affections and petitions suitable to her state. St. Francis de Sales insisted much on this point in the direction which he gave to St. Jane de Chantal and her daughters. After prayer, the soul applies herself to the work of gathering in all the fruits, and keeping herself, by interior mortification, in the fervour and purity which will dispose her for the reception of new graces, if such be the will of God.

When she has been thoroughly tried, and again and again, in the passive purifications, it seems to this poor soul that she has been abandoned by God; yet there has been no loss, except for the old man. We are in the hands of God. Why should we be discouraged? Is not He almighty? The surest means of shortening the trial is to submit without complaint, without murmuring or disquietude. Far from holding ourselves purely passive, let us place our confidence in God, our Best of friends, our infinitely wise and good Father; let us offer Him for as long as He requires our hands and our feet, that He may nail them to the cross at His leisure. And let us not flee from Him when our prayer promises to be dry. Rather let us go to it as from habit, and courageously discharge our duty. Of course, we must not be in any way the voluntary cause of our aridity; and we must maintain before God an attitude humble, repentant, submissive, and always full of confidence, in order that the dolorous condition in which we find ourselves may produce in our souls the richest fruits of humility, renunciation, and holy abandonment. So shall we have made a usurious profit.

Such was the line of conduct which St. Jane de Chantal followed herself, and caused to be followed by her spiritual daughters. "In this passive state she did not abstain from activity at certain times, as when God suspended His operation, or when grace moved her thereto. But

always her acts were short, humble and loving. 'Yes, my daughter,' said she, 'whenever God wills it and makes known His will to me by a movement of grace, I elicit some interior acts, or I pronounce some interior words, particularly for the purpose of repelling temptation. God does not permit me to be so rash as to presume to think that I never have need of special acts. And I believe that those who say they elicit none at any time are mistaken. I even believe our Sister Anne-Marie Rosset produces some without being aware of it. At least I oblige her to make exterior acts.' "

The Saint, then, was careful, adds her historian, "to do nothing except under the influence of grace. She remained absolutely submissive and obedient to its inspirations, whether God, in suspending His own operation, invited her to activity or left her to herself. She thus passed from one state to another, alternately passive and active, according to the divine good-pleasure: remarkable vicissitudes in the life of this great saint, and which tended, as Bossuet observes, to render her pliable under the mighty hand of God, and to make her constantly adjust herself to the different states wherein He placed her. It was to this she owed the admirable virtues, submissions and resignations that adorned her life. . . . This extraordinary state, which the Saint at first experienced only in prayer, soon asserted itself at Mass and Holy Communion, during the Office in choir, and not seldom throughout the day. Sometimes it lasted but for a moment, during which she remained silent, her eyes closed, united to God by a simple look. On other occasions it was prolonged for the space of several hours, but without taking from her either freedom of thought or of action." <sup>41</sup>

This last remark prompts us to say that as we may be divinely moved in our prayer, so, too, may we be in our actions. We have spoken at length on prayer, because

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<sup>41</sup> Bougaud, *Hist. de Ste. Ch.*, c. xviii; Bossuet, *États d'Or.*, I, viii, 26 à 40.

it seems to us that it is there *most particularly* the mystical influence makes itself felt; and all we have said will perhaps enable us to understand better what that influence will be, and how we should correspond to it, when we encounter it, as is possible, outside of prayer.

In the common way, grace remains hidden, even from him who receives it. It leaves to us the initiative, the choice in things lawful, the deliberation, the determination, the execution. At bottom, however, it is from the grace of the Holy Spirit all proceeds, since in the supernatural order nothing is possible unless He suggest the thought of it, and helps us both to will and to accomplish it. But He conceals Himself, and so accommodates Himself to our natural processes that everything appears to come from our own efforts. It is only by faith we know that our wills have been helped by hidden grace and at certain moments sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In mystical action, on the contrary, just as in mystical prayer, the divine influence makes itself felt, and becomes, so to speak, sensible. It is no longer at pains to follow our human processes. All at once, the soul is illuminated and set in motion, as if by a divine instinct, a particular inspiration, a special impulse. But however sudden, however sweetly imperious the action of God, it does not suppress the natural exercise of our liberty; our consent is given freely and with great gladness, and we deliberately unite the energies of all our powers in order to correspond. Hence Bossuet could say with truth: "We are the more active in proportion as we are the more impelled, moved, and animated by the Holy Spirit; the very act whereby we deliver ourselves up to the divine influence sets us, so to speak, all in motion for God."<sup>42</sup> But in another sense it can be said that we are the less active according as we are the more passive: we feel that a superior power has taken the initiative, made choice of the particular act, replaced deliberation by a divine instinct, and urges us on to the execution. When a soul is frequently favoured

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<sup>42</sup> *Discours sur l'acte d'abandon.*

with such mystical influences, we express the fact by saying that she is under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Can a soul be *always* and in *all things* guided thus by the Spirit of God? According to St. John of the Cross, this has been the case with the Blessed Virgin, and with her alone. "Exalted from the beginning of her existence to this sublime state (in which God Himself moves the faculties to acts conformable to His good-pleasure), the glorious Mother of God had never in her mind the thought of any creature capable of distracting her from God and directing her in her conduct. All her movements were always excited by the Holy Spirit. . . . Although it would be difficult to find another soul entirely led by the Lord, and favoured with the perpetual union in which the powers are always divinely occupied, nevertheless, we meet many who are moved by Him in their actions, and not by their own free choice."<sup>43</sup> Bossuet speaks to the same effect. "Those imaginary states of our false mystics," he writes, "wherein the soul is always divinely moved by the extraordinary impressions of which we speak, were unknown to St. John of the Cross and to St. Teresa. I may add that neither the Angelas, nor the Catherines, she of Genoa and she of Sienna, nor the Avilas, nor the Alcantaras, nor any other of the purest and most contemplative souls, ever believed themselves to be always passive, but only at intervals. And when, as often happened, they were restored to themselves, they acted in the ordinary way. The same thing occurs in the case of Mother de Chantal, one of the most experienced contemplatives of our own times. . . . Is there perhaps or has there ever been a small group of privileged souls moved thus by the Holy Spirit at every instant?" He leaves the question to God, and without acknowledging the existence of such states, simply declares that in practice there can be nothing so dangerous or so liable to illusion as to direct souls as if they had already arrived at this extraordinary passivity; and that in any case

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<sup>43</sup> *Montée*, I, iii. c. i.



Christian perfection does not consist in graces of this kind. With regard to passive states, he points out two opposite errors: that of the Quietists, who made the passivity perpetual, very common, and necessary at least for perfection; and that of those who consider as illusions "all such states in which certain privileged souls passively receive divine impressions, so sublime and wonderful that we can scarcely comprehend their admirable simplicity."<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, so long as we feel the action of God in us, we should follow it with trustful docility. As soon as it ceases, we must resume the ordinary means of avoiding sin, practising virtue, and discharging our daily duties. And as the road has been clearly traced out for us, and grace shall never be wanting to prayer and fidelity, we have no need to wait until God manifests to us His will anew, or until He urges us to action by a particular motion. Or rather "it is not permitted a Christian," as Bossuet says, "under the pretext of passive or other extraordinary prayer, in the conduct of his life, whether as regards things spiritual or temporal, to wait until God determines him to each action by means of a particular movement of grace. To act in this way is to tempt God, and leads to illusion and careless indifference."<sup>45</sup>

But in matters so delicate we have to be especially on our guard against illusions. Our mystical life must consequently be subjected to serious control, according to the rules for the discernment of spirits. If its effect is to make us more observant of our vows and rules, more obedient to our superiors, more desirous to live in peace with our brethren, more vigorous in combatting temptations, and more zealous to sanctify our trials: there is no room for suspicion as to its origin or as to the use we are making of it. But even then we should imitate St. Teresa the Elder: "What she always most ardently desired was the acquisition of the virtues, and the same she most earnestly recommended to her nuns; for she was

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<sup>44</sup> *Etats d'Or.*, I, x, 14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, *Art. d'Issy*, xxv.

accustomed to say that the more humble and mortified a soul is, the more spiritual will she be also." <sup>46</sup>

As it is very difficult to be a good judge in our own case, here most particularly we have need of an experienced director. Besides, Providence has ordained that men should be governed by their fellow-men. Our Lord appeared to Saul and sent him to Ananias. St. Teresa the Elder, St. Jane de Chantal, and St. Margaret Mary possessed very enlightened minds and very sound judgments; nevertheless, they always had recourse to their directors or to their superiors, as the case might be. Speaking of herself, St. Teresa says that "she never regulated her conduct by the inspirations she received in prayer, and when her confessors told her to act against them, she obeyed without the least reluctance, and kept them informed of all that happened her. . . . Our Lord assured her that she did right in obeying, and that He would Himself manifest the truth of her inspirations." <sup>47</sup> But He showed Himself angry with those who forbade her to pray. He spoke in the same sense to St. Margaret Mary: "Henceforth I will adjust My graces to the spirit of the rule, to the will of your superiors, and to your own weakness. And you must regard with suspicion whatever would withdraw you from your exact observance. I want you to prefer that to everything else, and your superiors' will to Mine. Whenever they forbid you to do what I have ordered you, let them have their way. I shall know how to accomplish My design by means that may seem unsuitable and opposed thereto." He proved, in the sequel, what terrible blows He could deal in order to beat down the opposition. For although He commands us to "try the spirits, if they be of God," <sup>48</sup> yet when the trial has been made sufficiently, He will suffer no one to stand in His way.

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<sup>46</sup> *Vie*, I, rel, au R. P. Alv.

<sup>47</sup> *Vie*, c. xxix.

<sup>48</sup> Gauthey, *Vie de la Ste. Marg.-Marie*, Nos. 72, 179, 180.

## CHAPTER XV

### TWO MEMORABLE EXAMPLES

**B**EFORE concluding this study of abandonment in the midst of interior pains, we shall cite two memorable examples, eminently well calculated to instruct and encourage us. We shall learn therefrom how God treats the greatest souls and how their trials serve to sanctify them.

“ Towards the end of the year 1604, St. Jane de Chantal found herself attacked by horrible temptations against the faith, doubts concerning the most sacred mysteries, and in particular concerning the divine authority of the Church. Whenever these temptations disappeared for a short time, it was only to give place to obscurity, impotence, great aridities, a complete absence of relish and devotion in the practice of virtue. Vainly she applied herself to prayer: her intellect, so keen for all other business, remained shrouded in darkness. She endeavoured to elicit acts of the love of God, but her heart seemed to have turned to marble. The very name of God was enough to chill her. The result was desolations impossible to describe.” This dolorous state lasted for more than forty years. But during the last nine years, it redoubled its intensity, and became “ a terrible agony which ceased only a month before her death. Her soul was abandoned to so many and such cruel interior pains that she could no longer recognise herself. She did not dare turn her eyes upon her interior or raise them to God. Her soul seemed to her all soiled with sins, black with ingratitude, disfigured, horrible to behold. The more good works she accomplished for God’s greater glory, the more her sanctity dazzled the eyes of the world, so much the more did she see herself stripped of all virtue, despoiled of all merit. If we except impure images with

which she was never troubled, her mind was invaded by evil thoughts of every description, and actions the most detestable were presented to her imagination, in which doubts relating to the most adorable mysteries, blasphemies against the most merciful attributes of God, and the most abominable suspicions of her neighbours contended for the mastery. No wonder the great tears rolled down her cheeks when she spoke of her interior trials. During the night she could be heard moaning as one sick unto death. In the daytime she would forget to take food or drink. And the most terrible affliction of all was the thought, coming in the midst of her temptations, that God had finally abandoned her, that He regarded her no more, no longer occupied His mind with her. In her utter desolation she called to Him, but it was as if she had stretched out her arms in the darkness to a loved one gone for ever. Or rather God was more than absent to her. He seemed to have become her enemy. He repulsed her. It was in vain she endeavoured, in order to calm her fear, to represent Him to herself under the images of the Good Shepherd, the Spouse, the loving Friend; for she immediately saw Him appearing as an irritated Judge, as a Master despised and demanding vengeance. Little by little, all the exercises concerned with God became a burden to her. Trembling took hold of her whenever she had to apply herself to prayer, and particularly when she approached for Communion. For then the thought of her crimes on the one hand and of the Divine sanctity on the other pierced her heart like a two-edged sword." This was an exceedingly sublime but terribly purifying contemplation. "Hitherto, she had retained all her lights for the direction of others. Now this was no longer the case. Such direction became for her a source of fearful temptations. She could not hear anyone speak of a pain without suffering from it herself, nor hear a sin mentioned without believing herself guilty of it."

"Here is a spectacle worthy of eternal meditation," exclaims her historian. "This strong woman, gifted with

a powerful and noble intelligence : behold her crushed, annihilated, incapable of guiding herself, obliged to grope her way along this path of the spiritual life which she knows so well for the direction of others, but when there is question of her own can no longer see ! It was thus God produced and preserved her humility. It was thus He preserved the humility of the great saints whom we admire in history, who raised the dead and predicted the future, and concerning whom we sometimes ask with trembling how they could have been humble. Whilst the crowds carried them in triumph and reverently kissed their feet, God humbled them in the centre of their souls ; He allowed them to be afflicted with shameful buffets, and in the innermost recesses of their hearts caused them to undergo such an agony as made them insensible to all the honours of the world."

St. Jane de Chantal was therefore reduced to such a state that nothing on earth could afford her any comfort, excepting the thought of death. "It is now forty-one years that temptations have been overwhelming me," she said one day. "Ought I therefore to lose courage? No! I am determined to hope in God even though He should kill me and annihilate me for ever." And she added these humble and magnificent words : "My soul was a piece of iron so rusted with sin that it needed this fire of divine justice to burnish it a little."

"In this state of abandonment," writes St. Alphonsus, "her one rule of conduct was simply to look at God and allow Him to act. She always exhibited a cheerful countenance, was pleasant in conversation, and kept her eyes continually fixed on the Lord, reposing in the bosom of His adorable will. St. Francis de Sales, her director, knowing how beautiful this soul was in the sight of God, compared her to a deaf musician who produces exquisite music, yet can derive no pleasure therefrom. And he wrote to her as follows : 'You must manifest an invincible loyalty towards the Saviour, serving Him not alone without satisfaction but under the cruel oppression of sad-

ness and fear.' Later on, Mother de Chatel gave her this prudent and virile counsel : ' Never speak of your troubles either to God or to yourself. Don't scrutinise them. Keep looking at God, and if you can speak to Him, speak to Him only of Himself.' Other persons will have need to speak of their sufferings to God in prayer and to His minister for the purpose of direction. But how good it is to detach souls from themselves, to teach them to look less at self and more at God, to be much preoccupied with His interests and very little with their own, and to extinguish thus the interior pains as one extinguishes a fire by withdrawing from it the fuel."

And the same author adds : " It is thus we attain to sanctity. In the spiritual edifice, the saints are the chosen stones which, wrought into shape with hammer and chisel, that is to say, by means of temptations, fears, darkness, and other afflictions, interior and exterior, have become worthy to crown the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, or in other words, to occupy the most exalted thrones in the kingdom of God." <sup>1</sup>

St. Alphonsus speaks thus from his own experience. " For God's sake he had abandoned all things, crucified his flesh, faced the fatigues of a hard apostolate, suffered cruel persecutions with patience, and even the ignominy of being expelled from his Congregation. All this had bruised his heart a thousand times over. However, one treasure still remained to him of which no power on earth could deprive him : he still possessed God, Who consoled him in his sorrows and often drew him to His heart in sweet raptures. Having Jesus, he could no longer feel lonely, and his little cell became a paradise."

But now, all of a sudden, the paradise disappeared. God, the very Sun of his soul, ceased to shed His light upon him. A night more horrible than that of the tomb enveloped the poor solitary. He saw himself forsaken by all, forsaken by God, and on the very brink of the precipice.

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<sup>1</sup> Bougaud, *Hist. de Ste. Ch.*, cc. vii et xxiii; St. Lig., *Am. env.*, c. xiii.

Turning his gaze back over his past life, he could see nothing there but sin. All his labours, all his good works, were only tainted fruit, disgusting to the eyes of God. His conscience, tormented with scruples from morning till night, the sport of every illusion, converted into mortal sins his simplest and even his holiest actions. Thus he, the great moralist, who had given his views, and with perfect discernment, on all kinds of cases of conscience, who had directed thousands of Christians in the ways of perfection, reassured multitudes of sinners by reminding them of the infinite mercy of God, comforted so many souls a prey to anxieties : he himself has now to grope his way, like a poor blind man skirting the mouth of the abyss, incapable of making a single step without the support of a stranger's arm.

“ In this condition of trouble and desolation, he no longer dared receive Holy Communion. His love for Jesus Christ drew him towards the altar, but fear prevented him from opening his mouth for the Sacred Host,” until the words of his director or his superior reassured him. “ At the height of his troubles, he sought the relief to be found in prayer. But it seemed to him that an insurmountable wall had risen up to separate him from God. Then, his darkness growing always denser, he had a feeling that the heart of God was closed against him and paradise lost to him for ever. In his unspeakable anguish, he contemplated the crucifix, and, his eyes streaming with tears, he implored the help of the Blessed Mother, implored the Saviour's mercy : ‘ My Jesus, do not allow me to be damned. My God, do not send me to hell, because in hell I could never again love Thee. Punish me as I deserve, but do not banish me from Thy sight forever.’ ”

“ To the scruples which made life insupportable for him were soon added, for good measure, the most violent temptations against all the virtues. Doubts arose in his mind with regard to every article of the Creed. And as his darkened conscience could no longer distinguish between sentiment and consent, it seemed to him that faith was

dead in his soul. But he clung to the truth with the most desperate tenacity, he multiplied acts of faith, he cried out with all the earnestness of his soul: 'I believe, O Lord; yes, I believe: I am resolved to live and die a child of Holy Church.' "

The demon received power to obsess him even in visible form. He made use of this power to fill his soul with temptations and desolations, to subject him to furious assaults and to invent for his ruin a thousand perfidious artifices. He endeavoured by all means to excite in him a sentiment of complacency in his writings. Failing in this, he sought to awaken the passion of lust, and so to destroy this angel of purity, who to extreme old age had preserved unsullied the white robe of his baptismal innocence. For more than a year Alphonsus experienced the terrible effects of Satan's power over the imagination and the senses. "I am eighty-eight years old," he said one day, "and I still feel within me all the fire of youth." The assaults occasionally grew so very violent that he would break out into sobs and groans, and stamp the floor with his foot, uttering such cries as: "My Jesus, rather let me die than offend Thee. O Mary, unless thou speedest to my aid, I shall become a worse criminal than Judas." He would then appeal for help to his director or superior. For in this frightful hurricane, which lasted eighteen months, his only comfort was obedience. Incapable of judging for himself, he accepted blindly the decisions of his director or any other priest, in spite of his uneasy feelings and the arguments to the contrary suggested to him by the demon. "My head," he used to say, "does not want me to submit." Often he could be heard uttering words like these: "Lord, grant that I may learn to conquer myself and make myself submissive. No, I do not wish to contradict my directors, I do not wish to depend upon myself." And obedience triumphed over all his temptations.

"Now, if we ask why the Lord permits His dearest



friends to be afflicted with trials so terrible, we shall find the solution of the mystery in the cross. It is necessary that the saints, living members of Jesus Christ, should accomplish in themselves His bitter Passion. Then, when humiliations and sufferings have purified and transfigured them, God will bring them out of the purgatory where He had confined them, their darkness will give place to light, joy will superabound where sorrow abounded; and soon the world shall admire an ecstatic or a thaumaturgus in the man who heretofore seemed to be abandoned by heaven. At least this is what happened in the case of St. Alphonsus, after the distressing trial of which we have just spoken, and even in the midst of his bitter tribulations. His ecstasies and raptures became more frequent than ever.”<sup>2</sup> God does not lead all souls to perfection by the one path. But at any rate these interior sufferings, generously endured, will always yield an immense harvest of merit and growth in the spiritual life.

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<sup>2</sup> Berthe, *S. Alph. de l'ag.*, 1, vi, c. xiv.

## FOURTH PART

# THE EXCELLENCE AND FRUITS OF HOLY ABANDONMENT

## CHAPTER I

### ON THE EXCELLENCE OF HOLY ABANDONMENT

**W**HAT constitutes the excellence of holy abandonment is the incomparable efficacy it possesses for removing the obstacles to the action of grace, for making us practise the noblest virtues in their perfection, and for establishing the absolute dominion of God over our wills. Obviously, the conformity that comes from hope, and particularly the resignation begotten of fear, cannot rise to the same altitude. These, nevertheless, have their value. But we are speaking now of the perfect, filial, and confident conformity which can only come from divine love.

And we have to show first of all that it is a necessary and supremely efficacious means for the removal of obstacles. One morning, after Matins, the Blessed Henry Suso was ravished out of his senses. It seemed to him that he saw a beautiful youth descending from heaven and heard him say: "You have now been long enough attending the little schools of perfection, and have sufficiently acquired what they have to offer: you have graduated therefrom. But come with me, for I wish to bring you to the highest school in the whole world. And what is this most desirable school? It is that which teaches the science of the perfect abandonment of self; that is to say, where man is taught to renounce himself to such a degree that, in all circumstances which manifest

the divine good-pleasure, he endeavours to remain constantly calm and equable, as forgetful of self as human infirmity allows. He must learn to see nothing but the divine honour and glory, and to keep himself as attentive to God as was the amiable Jesus to His heavenly Father." For many years the Blessed Henry had been practising virtue as a valiant ascetic; he had inflicted on his body a martyrdom the mere description of which is enough to make us tremble; he had already arrived at the spiritual age of ecstasy. Nevertheless, God summoned him to a higher school. Had he really need of it? Coming to himself after the vision, he remained silent and reflected on the words he had heard. "Examine yourself interiorly," he then said to himself, "and you will see that you still retain much of your own spirit. You will discover that with all the mortifications you practise, you are not yet able to endure every kind of opposition from others. You are like a hare hidden in a thicket, which is terrified at the rustle of a leaf. For you are constantly in fear of the afflictions that may befall you; you grow pale at the mere sight of your opponents; you take flight when you are afraid of succumbing; when you ought to stand forward you conceal yourself; you feel happy when people praise you; when you are blamed you become depressed. It is therefore very true that you have need to frequent a higher school." <sup>1</sup>

Here, then, is one who walked resolutely forward in the ways of sanctity. Yet much of the old man still remained in him, even more than he suspected. How many others, inferior to him in virtue, would need, as he, an angel from heaven to open their eyes to the evil in them and to show them how it should be remedied!

We know, as a matter of theory, that the evil consists in an inordinate seeking of ourselves; consequently, in pride and sensuality, which represent it under a great variety of forms. But in fact we are very far from having a true knowledge of ourselves. Often enough, that world

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<sup>1</sup> *Exempl.*, c. xxi.

of passions, weaknesses, attachments, and evil tendencies of all kinds, which we have surging within us, would remain covered with a thick veil and so never attract our attention, did not Providence condescend to enlighten us opportunely by means of a good humiliation or some other trial judiciously chosen for the purpose. Then the veil was rent, and we began to see that which had hitherto been concealed from our eyes, but which, alas ! may have been visible enough to our neighbours. It is not sufficient, however, to have discovered the evil, for it is possible that we may still be ignorant of the remedy to apply.

We are very much disposed to spare ourselves. Providence will have none of this cruel kindness. "Hitherto," said the angel to Blessed Henry Suso, "you scourged yourself with your own hand; you left off when you wished, and took compassion on yourself. I will now withdraw you from your own tutelage, and throw you defenceless into the hands of strangers who shall henceforth wield the scourge. (They will do so, however, only as far as I shall permit them, although to you they will seem without mercy.) You shall witness the ruin of your reputation, you shall become a butt for the scorn of blinded men, and that will cause you much bitterer suffering than did the wounds formerly inflicted by your instruments of penance."<sup>2</sup>

Heretofore we found certain compensations for our sacrifices. Providence will now deprive us of all these. There were human consolations. "When you adopted your practices of penance," said the angel to Blessed Henry, "you were admired as a great ascetic; but henceforth you shall be humbled and annihilated." Above all, there were the consolations of God: "Up to this," continued the angel, "you have been treated as a spoiled child; you have been swimming in a superabundance of heavenly sweetness like a fish in the ocean. For the future I intend to change all this. It is my will that you

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<sup>2</sup> *Exempl.*, c. xxii.

should be deprived of every comfort, that you should keenly suffer from the deprivation, and that you should be abandoned by God and men.”<sup>3</sup>

We did not always strike the blows on the proper place. But Providence has a clearer vision and attacks the seat of the malady. Blessed Henry Suso had a very affectionate disposition, and appeared to give it little attention. “Although you have inflicted many cruel tortures on yourself,” the angel said to him, “you still retain, by God’s permission, a tender and loving nature. It will come to pass that there where you expected to find particular love and loyalty you will meet instead with infidelity, great sorrows, and great sufferings. Your afflictions will become so numerous that those who have any regard for you will suffer with you from compassion.” Our most perilous malady is pride. Now, “to cure ourselves of it,” says Piny, “do we ordinarily seek occasions of humiliation and contempt? Do we not believe we have done enough if we condemn ourselves to giving an alms or to practising some austerities which mortify the body rather than the spirit? But God, Who designs not merely to punish but also to cure, acts with much more wisdom. He obliges us to expiate this sin by that which is most contrary to our presumption and vanity: by contempt, humiliations, rebuffs, confusions, and therefore by the penances most disagreeable to our natural pride, most directly opposed to our inclinations.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, there is the radical evil of undue attachment to one’s own judgment and one’s own will. This is the poisoned source of all our sins and imperfections. How few know how to trace their particular maladies to this fountain-head of every disorder! Only too often is it not self-judgment that pretends to prescribe the remedy, and self-will that sees to the application, whilst, on the contrary, it is just self-judgment and self-will that should be sacrificed without mercy and first of all? Providence will

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *Le Ciel sur terre*. 5<sup>e</sup> édit., c. xii.

help us to correct such errors or such weakness. "Show me, O Lord, my sufferings in advance, that I may not be unprepared for them," said Blessed Henry Suso. And God answered him : " No, it is better you should not have this foreknowledge." For He desires to keep us constantly disposed to renounce our judgments and to immolate our wills. Therefore He is careful to conceal His designs from us. Very often He will proceed in a manner contrary to our anticipations and ideas, and will directly attack both our tastes and repugnances. If we wish to examine the matter closely we shall find that He does nothing without a very definite purpose. As a true Saviour, as a Physician as firm as He is wise and discreet, He applies the fire and the iron now to this place, now to that, but particularly there where His practised eye sees faults to be expiated, defects to be corrected, or a weak point to be strengthened. In spite of the protests of nature, He will continue the treatment with a merciful severity, so long as He judges it necessary to complete our cure and to dispose us for the reception of His gifts. " Self-will," says Piny, " that which man loves most dearly and most highly prizes, is thus put to the torture and most cruelly oppressed, since it is compelled to endure not merely what it does not desire but even what is most contrary to its desire." God wills to conquer and tame it. This is why " certain souls find themselves almost continually in a state disagreeable to them : sometimes in profound darkness during prayer, instead of the light which would be more pleasant indeed, but which would serve to foster their self-will ; sometimes in sadness and wearisome languor as a punishment for the immoderate joys formerly experienced, or for undue attachment to consolations ; sometimes in incertitudes, fears, and scruples, on account of a too great eagerness for their perfection, so that they may learn to die to themselves by accepting the will of God in their regard, in spite of their fears and their doubts." <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Id., ibid.*

It is therefore by holy abandonment we shall complete the purification and the detachment of our souls. The faithful discharge of our daily duties, and for us religious the inviolable observance of our vows and rules, along with the voluntary practice of the virtues, have inflicted on the old man defeat after defeat, wound upon wound. Nevertheless, he would still survive if holy abandonment did not come to give him the finishing blow and lay him in the tomb. No doubt, obedience does not cease to be a prime necessity. In the measure in which it is relaxed, nature will regain the upper hand and speedily put an end to holy abandonment. But abandonment comes to unite its force to the powerful action of obedience. It provides, in addition, for our more personal needs. And it thus brings our penitence to its highest perfection. It does as much for trustful faith and divine charity.

It is abandonment that renders our faith in Providence, our confidence in God, completely practical and universal, by converting them from a conviction of the mind into an affection of the heart, and applying them successively to the most diversified situations. Without it, they would run the risk of remaining always incomplete. For there are truths which we can hardly learn otherwise than from experience repeated over and over again. To give an example. Jesus Christ has said: Blessed are the poor; blessed those that suffer; blessed those that mortify themselves; blessed those that endure persecutions, calumnies, and maledictions from their fellow-men. Now, they who cannot patiently support poverty, suffering, and persecution: have they this practical and universal faith? "It must be acknowledged that they either do not believe the Gospel or only in part. On the contrary, he truly believes all that it contains who regards it as an advantage, as a mark of divine favour, to be poor in this world, to be sick, to be despised, humbled, and persecuted by men." <sup>6</sup> These are the words of St. Alphonsus.

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<sup>6</sup> *Am. env*, c. xi.

This confident, practical, and universal faith is brought to its highest perfection, says Piny, "by the abandonment of all that we are and all our interests to the divine good-pleasure. Is it not a proof of a very strong faith in the justice and sanctity of God, the fact that, in everything that befalls us, we need only remember that such is His will in order to be able immediately to say amen to all His decrees? We cannot show greater faith in the goodness and love of God than by receiving with equal readiness from His hands joys and sorrows, prosperity and adversity, and, in the firm conviction that He is a God Who does well whatever He does, by blessing His name, like Job, as much on the dunghill as on the throne, as much when He covers us with wounds and humiliations as when He lavishes upon us consolations and honours. There can be no greater or livelier faith than to believe that God is managing our affairs with admirable wisdom and love when He seems to be destroying and annihilating us, when He frustrates our holiest designs, when He exposes us to calumny, obscures all our lights in prayer, dries up our devotion and fervour with aridities, ruins our health with infirmities and languors, reduces us to incapacity for doing anything at all. To preserve an unshaken confidence under all these trials, to accept everything blindly: is not this an exercise of the most vivid faith in the sovereign power and infinite goodness of God?" Wonderful was the faith exhibited by Abraham in the terrible trial which everybody knows. "But not less admirable is the faith of him who walks in the way of abandonment. For God nearly always acts in the same manner (as in the case of Abraham) with regard to those who abandon themselves to Him, for the purpose of annihilating their self-will." To break our attachment to joys, He sends us sorrows; to break our attachment to human esteem, He sends us humiliations and contempt; He weans us from the love of sweetness and sensible devotion by desolation and aridities, from the love of light in prayer by darkness and obscurity; He sets Himself



to restrain our over-eagerness for perfection by means of bitterly afflicting failures, our excessive activity by the impotence to which He sometimes reduces us, our self-will even in what concerns our salvation by filling our minds with doubts and incertitudes. If anywhere is practised a lively faith, an invincible confidence, most assuredly "it is in abandonment to the divine will, since in this state we believe that which appears most incredible, namely, that God will promote our interests by ruining them, that He will form us by annihilating us, that He will illuminate us by making us blind, that He will unite us most intimately to Himself by leaving us in anguish; in a word, that He will bring us to perfection by destroying our natural inclinations and our wills." <sup>7</sup>

In this way, then, the practice of holy abandonment supposes a lively faith and a confidence already firm. But it develops them wonderfully and leads them to the loftiest degree of perfection. And it does this also and equally in the case of divine love.

Holy abandonment gives divine love a marvellous development, first of all, by the perfect detachment it implies. "When the heart is full of affection for worldly objects, it has no room for the love of God," writes St. Alphonsus, "and the more attached it is to earth, the less can divine love reign in it. For Jesus Christ wills to possess the whole heart, and will not suffer it to be shared by a rival. In fine, charity is an amiable robber that despoils us of all affection to created things." <sup>8</sup> We must give all to obtain all. *Da totum pro toto*, says Thomas à Kempis. This complete disengagement, so necessary and so laborious, has already been begun and even brought far forward by humility, obedience, and renunciation, which, moreover, will never cease to foster it. Nevertheless, as we have above remarked, they need to be reinforced by holy abandonment in order to bring detachment to its ultimate perfection. It is therefore

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<sup>7</sup> Piny, *op. cit.*, c. vii.

<sup>8</sup> *Reflex. pieuses*, 4, 13, 19.

abandonment that completes the emptying out of the soul. Now, divine love flows into our souls according as they make room for it; and when it finds them empty it fills them, governs them, transforms them, and reigns over them as their sovereign.

Not alone does abandonment prepare the way for divine love, but “it is itself an act of the most perfect love of God that can be produced; it is of more value than a thousand fasts and disciplines. For he who gives his substance in alms, his blood in disciplines, his sustenance in fasting, gives but a portion of what he possesses; whereas he who gives his will to God gives himself, gives all, so that he can say with truth: ‘Lord, I am poor, but I give Thee as much as I can; having resigned to Thee my will, I have nothing more to offer Thee.’ ”<sup>9</sup> So speaks St. Alphonsus.

Thus, abandonment is the purest and most disinterested love. There are many souls that delight in being with Jesus at the breaking of the bread, but very few that are willing to follow Him to the immolations of Calvary. It is easy enough to love Our Lord when He gives Himself to be enjoyed in sweetnesses, in ardours, and in transports. But it is a nobler and a greater thing to forget ourselves, and to give ourselves entirely to God, so far as to find all our contentment in pleasing Him, in adopting the divine will as our own, even though it intends to conduct us, as it undoubtedly does, in the footsteps of Jesus crucified. “Here,” says Piny, “you have the loftiest, purest, most perfect form of love. If we may measure the love we have for God by the magnitude of the sacrifices we are disposed to make for Him, what love can be purer and greater than that of those who abandon to His good-pleasure not only their temporal possessions, their reputation, their health and their lives, but even their very souls and their eternity, so that in all these things they have no desire but the ordinance and will of God?

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<sup>9</sup> *Amour divin*, 3.

Cannot such souls truly say that their love is entirely disengaged from all self-interest, since they put themselves in the position of victims, content that the Lord should destroy them any moment He pleases, and that He should make a perpetual sacrifice of their wills to His own?" <sup>10</sup>

We might add that the soul, whilst practising holy abandonment, exercises herself at the same time and in the most perfect manner in all the virtues, because she meets at every instant opportunities for the practice of humility, or obedience, or patience, or poverty, etc., and because her abandonment elevates these and the other virtues to the highest possible perfection. Piny establishes this point with an abundance of evidence. To economise space, we refer the reader to his invaluable little work. Let it suffice for us to say with St. Francis de Sales that "abandonment is the virtue of virtues; it is the cream of charity, the odour of humility, the merit, seemingly, of patience, and the fruit of perseverance. Great, in truth, is this virtue, and alone worthy to be practised by the genuine children of God." <sup>11</sup>

But if abandonment thus perfects the other virtues, it perfects no less the union of our souls with God. Such union in the present life comprehends indeed the union of the mind by faith and the union of the heart by love, but it consists most especially in the union of the will by perfect conformity with the divine will. Obedience must begin this union, and has always to support it; but it is holy abandonment alone that can bring it to consummation. For, can we possibly be united to God in a manner more complete, asks Piny, "than by giving Him a perfectly free hand in all that concerns us, accepting everything He sends us, lovingly acquiescing in all the ruins which He is pleased to make in us and of us? This is to will all that God wills, and nothing but what He wills and as He wills. It is, therefore, to have our

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<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, c. ix.

<sup>11</sup> *Entret.*, ii.

wills identified with the divine will, transformed into it; it is to be united to that which is most intimate in the Divinity, I mean His heart, His good-pleasure, His impenetrable decrees, His judgments which, however hidden from us, we know to be equitable and just." What union with God can be ever stronger or more indissoluble? "For in this state, what is it that can separate us from Him? Neither poverty, nor persecutions, nor life, nor death, nor any conceivable occurrences possess such power; because as we desire nothing apart from the will of God, and accept that in all things without examination, we always find our own wills in every event that happens, seeing therein the accomplishment of the divine good-pleasure." <sup>12</sup>

Now, here is what more than anything else recommends to us holy abandonment: the fact that nothing so well unites our wills to the will of God. But the divine will is the rule and measure of all perfection, so that only in as far as they are conformed thereto can our wills have perfection or sanctity. Consequently, we become more virtuous and holy in the measure in which we make God's will our own. Or rather, we are already holy and perfect when we have come to recognise in all events the hand and the good-pleasure of God, and acknowledge His will as the only rule of our conduct. And when we have attained to this point, what remains for us to do in order to become still more holy and perfect? To conform our wills ever more and more to the divine will; or, according to the energetic expression of St. Alphonsus, to identify our wills with the will of God, "so that of two wills we make one, in the sense that we never will anything but what He wills, our wills being lost in His. This is the summit of all perfection to which we must constantly aspire. The most holy Virgin was the most perfect amongst all the saints only because her will was always the most completely united to the will of God." <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, c. iii.

<sup>13</sup> *Conf.*, i; *Am. env.*, c. ix; *Résumé*, ix.

If, therefore, we would mount to the summit of the interior life, our best road is that of holy abandonment. No other can lead us so quickly or so far. God forbid that we should desire to depreciate humility, obedience, and renunciation! These fundamental virtues constitute, with prayer, the way that is always necessary and sure, outside of which there can be no solid virtue, no true abandonment. Let us walk in it unswervingly until our last sigh. But when by this way we shall have arrived at perfect, loving, and filial conformity, we shall then be in truth on the road to true sanctity.

## CHAPTER II

### ON THE FRUITS OF HOLY ABANDONMENT

#### ARTICLE I.—INTIMACY WITH GOD

**T**HE first fruit of abandonment, a fruit as nourishing as it is sweet, consists in a delightful intimacy with God, with a confidence most profoundly humble.

Should this occasion surprise? Is not God our own heavenly Father, and Goodness Itself? We shall meet no one on earth comparable to Him in devotion and tenderness. He is the very fountain-head where love is found in infinite abundance, and whence it is derived by participation to us. God the Father, in truth, must have an astonishing love for men, since, in order to save them, He did not hesitate to deliver up His well-beloved Son, the eternal Object of His boundless complacency. The Incarnate Word has condescended to love us more than His own life. Is He not our Saviour, our Friend by excellence, the Spouse of our souls? Has there ever been a heart worthy of being compared to His, a heart so devoted, so sweet, so merciful, so patient, so slow to punish and so prompt to forgive? And He is so marvellously humble, this Elder Brother of ours, that He refuses to keep at a distance His poor little brethren from the earth. Finally, the Sanctifying Spirit, is He not busy day and night with our souls, coming to our aid every instant, yearning over each one of us with infinitely more love and solicitude than that of the fondest mother bent above the cradle of her child? Yes, truly, "God is love" (I *John* iv, 16). When He is amongst His children, He gladly forgets His own greatness and our unworthiness; He is no longer anything but a Father; and He makes

Himself quite little with His little ones because He loves them so greatly.

Our holy father, St. Bernard, is inexhaustible when he describes the sweet intimacy of certain souls with God. "The Lover has come," he says, "consequently the Master withdraws, the King disappears, Majesty is put aside, fear gives way to the force of love. Just as of old Moses conversed with God as a friend with his friend, so now the Word and the soul converse familiarly together, like two persons living in the most intimate relations. What wonder? Their love, coming from the one same source, is reciprocal, and their caresses mutual. Words sweeter than honey escape from their hearts. They cast upon each other looks of inexpressible tenderness, eloquent signs of their common affection." This divine condescension is truly marvellous, but love explains it; for "God also loves. His love is not communicated to Him from outside; it has its source in Himself. He loves with all the greater energy because there is in Him nothing but love: He is essential Love. And such as He loves He regards and treats as friends, not as servants. See how even majesty must yield to love. For it is the characteristic of love to recognise neither greater nor lesser, but to level down all distinctions between the lovers. Whatever may be the difference in their rank, it reduces them to absolute equality, or rather makes them one." And whence comes this astonishing hardihood of the soul in making so free with the Divine Majesty? It is because she is His Spouse, with the love and the privileges of a spouse, and her heart is the sanctuary where He delights to dwell.

"How great a grace of holy familiarity between the Word and the soul must spring out of this divine indwelling! And from such familiarity how great a grace of confidence! There is no longer any reason that I can see why a soul thus privileged should not presume to say: 'My Beloved to me.' For in her consciousness that she

loves the Bridegroom, and loves Him ardently, she has convincing evidence that He loves her also, and loves her with similar ardour. In like manner with regard to her devoted attention to Him, her solicitude and carefulness for His glory, her laborious and diligent service, her zeal, which keeps her constantly and eagerly on the alert, ever anxious to know 'how she may please God'—she has no doubt at all that He, in His turn, is looking after her interests with the same watchful assiduity; because she remembers His promise, 'with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.' Nevertheless, the Spouse in her prudence is careful to claim for her own part only the return of love, recognising that she has been prevented by the grace of her Bridegroom. Therefore it is that she puts in the first place the giving which belongs to Him, when she says: 'My Beloved to me and I to Him.' Thus we see how from her own dispositions and sentiments towards God she comes to know what His feelings are for her. Such, in truth, is the case. It is God's love for the soul that excites the soul's love for Him; it is His antecedent attention to her that makes her attentive to Him; it is His solicitude for her that is the cause of her solicitude for Him. For once the soul is enabled to 'behold the glory of the Lord with open face' by some, I know not what, affinity of nature, she is immediately and of necessity conformed thereto and 'transformed into the same image.' From what has been said, we may gather that, such as we make and present ourselves to God, such also will He exhibit Himself to us. This is what the Psalmist means when he says to the Lord: 'With the holy Thou wilt be holy and with the innocent man Thou wilt be innocent.' And why may we not say with equal truth: 'With the loving Thou wilt be loving, with the reposeful Thou wilt be reposeful, with the attentive Thou wilt be attentive, and with the solicitous Thou wilt be solicitous.' Indeed, He has Himself declared: 'I love them that love Me; and they that in the morning early watch for Me shall find Me.'



“ You observe, my brethren, how He gives us here an assurance that we possess His love when we offer Him ours. But not only this. He also tells us that He watches with solicitude over our interests whenever He perceives us to be solicitous for His. Art thou vigilant in His service? Then He also is vigilant in thine. Rise up in the night to begin thy vigils, hasten as much as thou pleasest, even anticipating the *Matin* hour; thou shalt not be beforehand with Him, thou shalt find Him already waiting for thee. In this emulation of charity thou wouldst be acting rashly indeed wert thou to attribute to thyself either precedency or superiority. For He loves thee more than thou lovest Him, and His love for thee is older than thy love for Him. If the Spouse knows all this, yea, rather because she knows all this, art thou surprised to hear her glorying that the Infinite Majesty of God, neglecting, as it were, every other interest, attends exclusively to her, and that she in her turn disengages herself from all created objects in order to devote herself to Him with her whole heart’s affection? I must now bring my discourse to an end. But before concluding, I want to speak one last word, astonishing indeed, yet strictly true, for the benefit of those amongst you who may be called spiritual persons. What I desire to say is this: the soul that sees God beholds Him so intent upon herself as if she were the only object of His solicitude. Hence the confidence with which she affirms that Her Beloved attends to her and she to Him; for she also can have regard to nothing except to Him and to herself. How good Thou art, O Lord, to the soul that seeks Thee! Thou runnest to meet her, Thou dost embrace her, Thou revealest Thyself to her as her own Bridegroom, Thou Who art her Lord, yea, Who art above all things, God blessed for ever.

“ It is by this conformity of charity that the soul is wedded to the Word, when namely, loving even as she is beloved, she exhibits herself in her will conformed to Him to Whom she is already conformed in her nature. There-

fore, if she loves Him perfectly, she has become His Bride. What can be sweeter than such a conformity? What more desirable than this charity by which, O happy soul, not content any longer with human teachers, thou art enabled of thyself to draw nigh with confidence to the Word, to cleave to Him steadfastly, to interrogate Him familiarly and to consult Him in all thy doubts, as audacious in thy desires as thou art capacious in thy understanding? This is, in truth, the alliance of a holy and spiritual marriage. But it is saying too little to call it an alliance; it is rather an embrace. Surely we have then a spiritual embrace when the same likes and the same dislikes make one spirit out of two? Nor is there any occasion to fear lest the inequality of the persons should cause some defect in the harmony of wills, since love refuses to recognise inequalities and knows nothing of reverence. Love means an exercise of affection, not an exhibition of honour. Honour is given by him who is awe-stricken, who is astounded, who is terrified, who is filled with admiration. But none of these emotions has any place in the lover. Love is all-sufficient for itself. Whithersoever love comes, it subjugates and renders captive to itself all the other affections. Consequently, the soul that loves, simply loves and knows nothing else except to love. The Word is indeed One Who deserves to be honoured, Who deserves to be admired and wondered at; yet He is better pleased to be loved. For He is the Bridegroom and the soul is His Bride. And between a bridegroom and his bride what other relation or connection would you look for except the bond of a mutual love? Such is the strength of this bond that it overcomes even the most intimate union which nature forms, I mean the union between parent and child. So much is evident from the words of the Saviour: 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife.' You perceive, my brethren, how love as it is found between a bridegroom and a bride, is not only more powerful than

the other human affections, but it is even more powerful than itself.

“ It must also be remembered that this Bridegroom is not only loving, but is Love Itself. May it be likewise said of Him that He is Honour? You are at liberty to think so, if you choose, but there is no authority for this to be found in Holy Scripture. I have read therein that ‘ God is Charity,’ but never that He is Honour or Dignity. Not that God does not demand honour, for He has said : ‘ If I be a Father, where is My honour?’ But it is as a Father that He speaks thus. Were He to speak in His character as a Bridegroom, I believe He would use different language, and would say : ‘ If I be a Bridegroom, where is My love?’ For He has asked the same question concerning the reverence due to Him in quality of Lord : ‘ If I be a Master, where is My fear?’ God therefore requires to be honoured as a Father, and to be feared as a Lord, but to be loved as a Bridegroom. Now, amongst these various affections what is that which appears to excel and to hold the pre-eminence? Doubtless it is love. For without love ‘ fear hath pain ’ and honour finds no favour. Fear is slavish until it has been emancipated by love. And the honour which proceeds not from love better deserves to be called flattery than honour. To God alone are due honour and glory; but God will refuse to accept both the one and the other unless they are sweetened with the honey of love. Love is sufficient of itself, it pleases of itself, and for its own sake. It counts as merit to itself and is its own reward. Besides itself, love requires no motive and seeks no fruit. Its fruit is its enjoyment of itself. I love because I love, and I love for the sake of loving. A great thing, my brethren, is love, if yet it returns to its Principle, if it is restored to its Origin, if it finds its way back again to its Fountain-Head, so that it may be thus enabled to continue flowing with an unfailing current. Amongst all the emotions, sentiments and feelings of the soul, love stands distinguished in this respect, that in the case of it alone has

the creature the power to correspond and to make a return to the Creator in kind, though not in equality. For instance, if God were to manifest anger against me, surely I should not answer Him with a like exhibition of anger. No, indeed, but I should rather fear and tremble and supplicate mercy. Similarly, if He were to reprove me, instead of reproving Him in turn, I should prefer to justify Him. Neither shall I presume to judge Him when I am judged by Him, but I shall rather humble myself and adore His justice. He Who saves me does not require that I should reciprocate the favour by saving Him. Nor does He Who delivers all stand Himself in need of being delivered by any. If He chooses to act as a Master, I must conduct myself as a servant; if He commands I am bound to obey, without having any right to exact from Him a return of service or obedience. But consider how different is the case with love. For when God loves me He desires nothing else than to be loved by me. He loves me in order that I may love Him, because He knows well that all who love Him find in this very love their joy and happiness.

“ Truly a great thing is love. But it has degrees of greatness. In the highest of these degrees stands the love of the Spouse. The children also love, but they have an eye to the inheritance, the thought of losing which makes them suspicious of everything, causes them to regard with more fear than affection Him from Whom they hope to receive it. For my part, I look with suspicion on that love which appears to be supported by the hope of any other reward than a return of love. Such love is weak, and languishes, or even expires, if its hope happens to be withdrawn from it. It is an impure love, since it covets something foreign to its own nature. The love that is pure is never mercenary. Pure love derives none of its strength from hope, and yet suffers nothing from diffidence. This is the love proper to the Spouse, and she that is a Spouse is made a Spouse solely by this. Love is the sole dowry and the sole hope of the Spouse.

This is all-sufficing for her. With this alone the Bridegroom is content. He requires nothing else, and she possesses nothing else. It is such love as this that makes Him her Bridegroom, as it makes her His Bride. It belongs exclusively to the Bridegroom and the Bride, and none else, not even the children can share in it. To the children the Father says: 'Where is My honour?' not 'Where is My love?' For the Bridegroom reserves to the Bride her prerogative. Moreover, children are commanded to honour their father and their mother, but nothing is said to them about love; not because parents are not to be loved by their children, but because many children feel more inclined to treat their parents with respect than with love. True, 'the honour of the King loveth judgment,' as the Psalmist says; but the love of the Bridegroom, or rather the Bridegroom Who is Love, requires of His Spouse nothing more than a return of love and loyalty. Let her then who is so loved by Him, be careful to reciprocate His love. How, indeed, can she help loving since she is a Spouse, and the Spouse of Love? Or how is it possible that Love should not be loved?

"Rightly, therefore, does the Spouse, renouncing all other feelings, abandon herself entirely to love alone, since in the interchange of love she has to correspond to a Bridegroom Who is Love Itself. For even when her whole being has been dissolved and poured out in love to Him, what after all is her love compared with the never-failing outflow from Love's own Fountain? Love surely does not abound in an equal degree in her who loves and in Him Who is Love, in the soul of man and in the Word of God, in the Bride and in the Bridegroom, in the creature and in the Creator, any more than the water equally abounds in him who thirsts for it and in the well which is its source. What then? Shall her hope of the heavenly nuptials, and her yearning desire, and her ardent love, and her confident expectation, be all disappointed and perish wholly, because she cannot in

running keep up with a giant, or contend with honey in sweetness, or equal the meekness of the lamb, or rival the purity of the lily, or emulate the brightness of the sun, or compete in love with Him Who is Charity? Certainly not. For although the Spouse, as a creature, is less than her Creator, and hence loves also less; yet if she loves with her whole being, her love is perfect and wanting in nothing. Wherefore, as I have told you already, it is love of this kind that constitutes the spiritual marriage of the soul with the Word. For she cannot love in this perfect way without being perfectly loved in return, so that by the consent of the two parties the marriage is ratified and completed. But perhaps some may have a doubt as to whether the soul is anticipated and surpassed by the Word in loving. That, however, is quite certain: He loved her long before she began to love Him, as He loves her far more than she loves Him. Happy the soul who has deserved to be presented with the blessing of such exceeding sweetness! Happy the soul to whom it has been given to experience an embrace of such surpassing delight! This spiritual embrace is nothing else than a chaste and holy love, a love sweet and pleasant, a love perfectly serene and perfectly pure, a love that is mutual, intimate and strong, a love that joins two, not in one flesh but in one spirit, that makes two to be no longer two but one undivided spirit, according to the testimony of St. Paul, where he says: 'He Who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.' " <sup>1</sup>

But for whom is this delightful intimacy destined? For the loving and submissive soul. "I love them that love Me," says Divine Wisdom. Let us therefore love God, and we can be sure of being loved by Him. Let us love Him much, and we have the promise that we shall be loved much in return. Now, what is true love but that which gives itself, above all that which manifests and gives itself through obedience and filial abandonment? Our Lord has given us the assurance: "If any man love

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<sup>1</sup> *Serm. in Cant., lxi et lxxxiii.*

Me he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and will make Our abode with him " (*John* xiv, 23). And He has said again : " Who-soever shall do the will of My Father Who is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother " (*Matt.* xii, 50). In fact, obedience and holy abandonment impress upon us a family likeness to Him Who made Himself obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross. His most holy Mother is like to Him and dear to Him beyond all comparison, not merely because she bore Him in her womb, but also and much more because she surpassed all others in the fidelity with which she heard His word and kept it. Each of us can acquire this spiritual parentage, this most intimate relationship with our Divine Brother. And our family resemblance to Him will grow more striking in the measure in which we advance in love, obedience, and holy abandonment. Finally will come the happy day which shall behold our wills completely identified with the will of God, but at how terrific a cost in suffering and sacrifice ! Thenceforward, under the weight of the cross as amidst the joys of Thabor, we shall see nothing but God and His adorable will. Always we shall revere, approve, and lovingly accept the divine good-pleasure. Always we shall be content with God ; we shall kiss His hand even whilst it crucifies us ; and amid the torture and the agony we shall keep smiling at Him through our tears. Oh, then in truth, Jesus our Love and our Model, will rest His eyes and His heart upon us, as He did on His own sweet Mother, because He will perceive in us dispositions perfectly conformed to His own. God the Father will rejoice to behold in us the living image of His Son. The Holy Spirit, the principal Author of that image, will contemplate His work with a divine exultation. The whole Blessed Trinity will incline towards us in love, and with due proportion will deign to repeat of each of us : " This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

Here is the source of those divine intimacies which fill

the lives of the saints and the biographies of other pious persons. If we can credit the writings of a certain holy religieuse, on each page we find the most touching marks of the divine condescension. God the Father calls her "His little daughter of the earth," and speaks to her with all the tenderness of a fond mother addressing her little infant. Our Lord gives her the titles of "His little sister," "His daughter" and "His spouse." "My God, I love Thee with all my heart," said this humble soul. And the Divine Master answered her with infinite goodness and tenderness: "I also love you." Who can read without emotion the account of those visits made to her with ravishing *abandon* by the holy Child Jesus?

To this paternal affection on the part of God corresponds on the part of the soul a sweet confidence full of humility. "My God," said the same religieuse, "I believe in Thy love, I believe in Thy tenderness, I believe in Thy heart." For such souls know God by a lively and penetrating faith, and they know Him likewise by a sweet experience. Accustomed to see themselves loved so fondly and led with so much solicitude, they venture so far as to give vent to their feelings in effusions of tenderness, and in most intimate colloquies to utter words so full of affection and endearments to the thrice-holy God as one would hardly dare address to one's own mother. Assuredly, such familiarity does not displease God; He even deigns to take pleasure in it; since it is His grace that prompts it and encourages its continuance. But in order to preserve the soul from pride and to keep her fully detached, He suddenly ceases His caresses; He seems to forget her, and to treat her with cold indifference. However, she loses none of her confidence, but says to herself with this holy nun: "The heavenly Father wills that I should be His little daughter. Therefore, in my sufferings and interior trials I must conduct myself as an infant whom its mother hurts only in order to heal. It cries when its mother presses too hard, but that does not prevent it from reposing on her breast; and it gladly re-



ceives the caresses of her who has just made it weep. Then a mutual embrace full of tenderest affection puts an end to the tears. Such ought to be my behaviour towards my heavenly Father."

But what becomes of humility in such heart-to-heart colloquies? Sometimes the soul gives free vent to her tenderness. Then, confounded at her hardihood, she profoundly adores the God of her heart; she makes a thousand protestations of humble and loving submission; she buries herself in the sentiment of her misery and her nothingness. To this the good Master invites her by His grace; or, if necessary, He conducts her thither by humiliations: whilst exalting her, he never loses sight of the claims of humility. "Lord, what is it that attracts Thee towards me?" inquired the same religieuse. "It is your great misery," Jesus answered, "And My love for you is such that all your infidelities cannot prevent Me from lavishing My graces upon you." Thus, God knows how to exalt and humble us alternately in such a way that confidence and humility advance together and mutually support each other. Hence, for St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus humility was one of the sources, and by no means the least, of her confidence in God. We have already called attention to the fact. She looked for a way that would lead her to sanctity; and she found it in the words of Divine Wisdom: "Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me" (*Prov.* ix, 4). Here was a ray of light. She will make herself quite little in the sentiment of her weakness and her nothingness. She will always remain quite little. Her one ambition shall be to pass unnoticed, to be entirely forgotten. And being little as a child, she will love as a little child, she will obey as a little child, she will offer flowers as a little child. That is to say, she will make all the little sacrifices that a little child can make. But in return she will be loved as a little child; and the strong arms of Jesus shall serve her as a lift to hoist her up to the summit of perfection. She will have her little faults. Alas! even little children stumble

and fall occasionally. But then, without delay, they run weeping to their mother and throw themselves into her arms, to be forgiven and consoled. She will do the same. Pure she was as the purest of the saints, but were she guilty of all the sins ever committed, she would imitate the repentant Magdalen, and would not lose one iota of her confidence. "She knows she can depend upon the love and mercy of her good Master." Besides, with the humility of a little child, one cannot be lost. No, she will always be received with welcome by Him Who was "meek and humble of heart," and Who said: "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come to Me, for the kingdom of heaven is for such" (*Matt. xix, 14*).<sup>2</sup>

#### ARTICLE II.—SIMPLICITY AND LIBERTY

Jesus, at His entrance into the world, said to His heavenly Father: "Behold, I come to do Thy will" (*Heb. x, 9*). "What!" exclaims Mgr. Gay. "Does He not come to preach, to labour, to suffer, to die, to vanquish hell, to found the Church, and to save the world by the cross? True, all this is His task. But if His intention embraces these various objects it is only because such is the eternal will of His Father. It is this will alone that touches and determines Him. Whilst seeing all the rest, He attends to this exclusively. Of this only does He speak, on this only does He profess to depend. And later on, when working so many wonders, so many unheard-of, superhuman prodigies, He shall never really do anything more than this one simple thing: the will of His heavenly Father."<sup>3</sup> So, too, is it with him who practises holy abandonment. He has manifold duties to discharge. But whether in choir, or at manual labour, or spiritual reading; whether working for himself or for others; whether enjoying leisure or busily occupied; he has never more

<sup>2</sup> *Histoire*, c. xi; *Souvenirs*, au commencement.

<sup>3</sup> *Vie et Vert. Chrét.*, abandon, i.

than one thing to do : his essential duty, the holy will of God. He will pass through seasons of health and sickness, aridities and consolations, peace and conflict ; but amidst all this variety of events, he sees only one thing : the God of his heart Who directs them and employs them to manifest to him His divine good-pleasure. Around him, men come and go and busy themselves about sundry affairs. Whether they approve or blame or forget him, whether they are a cause of suffering or joy to him, he lifts his gaze above them and sees only God Who guides them, Who makes use of them to instruct him as to what he ought to do. In all occurrences, therefore, he attends to God alone and His adorable will. This is what gives his life a marvellous simplicity, an extremely simple unity. Is it necessary to add that such constant attention to God alone produces, naturally as it were, another fruit of inestimable value, a very great purity of intention ?

It also secures to us the liberty of the children of God. " If there is anything," says Bossuet, " capable of making the heart free and unconfined, it is perfect abandonment to God and His holy will." <sup>4</sup> And, in truth, nothing else can give us this freedom. Are they free, those sinners who live according to the impulse of their passions ? Certainly not. They are rather unfortunate slaves, oppressed by the tyranny of the world and their appetites. Can those Christians, who are still weak in the fulfilment of their duties, be rightly called free ? No, because occasions overpower them and human respect holds them still in bondage ; they will the good, but a thousand obstacles turn them aside ; they detest the evil, but lack the energy to separate themselves definitely from it. Can one regard as free those at least who have already made some progress in virtue, but are still attached to their own wills and eager for sensible consolations ? Not even these, because, in spite of appearances, self-love still rules them ; they are as much enslaved to it as worldlings are to their passions ; hence they are full of caprice and in-

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<sup>4</sup> *Parf. aband.*

constancy, and lose all their courage when subjected to trials. A soul is free and unfettered in proportion as her passions are mortified, self-love subdued, and pride trampled under foot. Interior mortification begins and continues this emancipation, but as we have seen, it is only by abandonment the work can be completed. For abandonment alone establishes us fully in indifference, it alone teaches us to see the goods and evils of life only in the divine good-pleasure, it alone attaches us to the holy will of God with all the love and all the confidence of which we are capable.

It makes us free with regard to temporal goods and evils, with regard to adversity and prosperity. No object of avarice, ambition, or pleasure can any longer hold us captive. Humiliations, sufferings, privations, crosses of no matter what kind, have ceased to dismay us. We have given all our hearts to God alone, and are ready for anything in order to accomplish His will. It makes us free with regard to our fellow-men. As our sole desire is to please God by a loving and filial submission, "no human respect can arrest our course," says Grou. "The judgments of men, their criticisms, their railleries, their contempt, no longer affect us. At least, they have no longer the power to turn us out of the right path. In a word, we are raised above the world and its errors, its attractions and its terrors. If this be not freedom, what, then, does freedom mean?"<sup>5</sup>

It makes us free with regard to God Himself. "I venture to say it," continues the same author, "that whatever may be the conduct of God towards such souls, whether He tries or comforts them, whether He draws nigh or seems to forsake them," howsoever He treats them, they lose neither their peace nor their courage. "In relation to God, their liberty consists in the fact that, willing all that He wills, without (deliberately) inclining to one side or the other, without any preoccupation with their own interests, they have acquiesced beforehand in

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<sup>5</sup> *Manuel des âmes int., de la liberté des enf. de Dieu.*

everything that happens, they have confounded their own choice with the divine good-pleasure, and have voluntarily accepted whatever it shall appoint." <sup>6</sup>

It makes us free with regard to ourselves, even in matters of piety. For holy abandonment establishes us in a complete indifference concerning all that does not belong to the divine good-pleasure. Hence, says St. Francis de Sales, "provided the will of God is accomplished, the mind does not worry about anything else," the heart has become free. "It is no longer attached to consolations, and receives afflictions with as much welcome as the flesh can permit. Mind, I do not say that it does not love and desire consolations. What I say is that it does not attach itself to them. It disengages its affections even from its spiritual exercises, so that if sickness or some other accident obliges it to omit them, it feels no regret. Again, I do not say that it does not love them but only that it is not attached to them." It never neglects them unless this be the will of God clearly made manifest to it. But it abandons them without the slightest hesitation as soon as the good-pleasure of God demands the sacrifice by means of necessity, charity, or obedience. Similarly, it does not lose patience with the importunity that incommodes it, for instance, by interrupting it during the time of meditation. For it wills to serve God only. And "it is quite indifferent whether it does this by attending to its devotions or by assisting its neighbour. But to assist its neighbour is the duty which God's will demands of it now." Untoward events no longer upset it; because nothing now engages its affections, and it wills only the accomplishment of the divine good-pleasure. The habitual practice of holy abandonment has therefore procured for it "the happy liberty of well-beloved children, that is to say, a thorough detachment from all things created, so that it can freely follow the known will of God." <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Lettre*, 390.

## ARTICLE III.—CONSTANCY AND EQUANIMITY

The world, with its confusion and desolation, is full of turbulence of mind and inconstancy of will. St. Francis de Sales traces the evil to its single source: it is all owing to the fact that the majority of men allow themselves to be led by their passions. They want to encounter no difficulties, no contradictions, nothing that can cause them pain. On the other hand, it is inconstancy and instability that characterise the accidents of our mortal existence. Hence it happens that now I feel joyous because everything has turned out according to my will; the next moment I shall be sad because I shall meet with some little opposition which will come unexpected. To-day, because you have consolation in prayer, you feel full of courage and resolved to serve God generously for the future; but to-morrow aridity shall be your portion, and in consequence you will be languid and depressed. You desire one thing at present; later on, you will wish for something else. Such a person pleases you to-day; to-morrow, you can scarcely endure him. I am all fire and flame for some work of zeal which charms me by its novelty or which promises to be a success; but when contradictions, failure, and monotony come, all my courage forsakes me. Is not this what we must expect so long as we allow ourselves to be led by our inclinations, passions, and affections? If these are not subjected to reason and faith, what can the future bring "but continual vicissitudes, inconstancy, caprices, variations and changes of mood which one moment will fill us with fervour and the next make us cowardly and slothful? One hour of tranquillity will be followed by two days of inquietude." But, adds the holy Doctor, "let us not imitate those who weep when consolations abandon them and can do nothing but sing at their return: wherein they resemble baboons which are always melancholy in dull weather but on fine days are all for frolic and fun." \*

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\* *Entret.*, iii et vii.

St. Alphonsus compares such souls to a weather-cock, because "they change continually in accord with the wind of worldly fortune: they are gentle and bright in prosperity, but in adversity impatient and sad. They live an unhappy life, and shall never arrive at perfection." <sup>9</sup>

But according as we advance in holy indifference and abandonment, we detach ourselves from all created objects and thereafter seek nothing, desire nothing but God alone. We have placed our full and entire confidence in our Father in heaven, and are accustomed to render Him prompt and loyal submission. We have no longer any wish to see persons or events except in God and in His will, so wise and so sanctifying. And by this very fact, we cease to be at the mercy of our constantly changing passions; we cease to be like chaff that is blown away by the first faint blast of the tempest. We become firm in our convictions, stable in our resolutions, persevering in our enterprises, always the same, always calm and serene. Such a one, says St. Alphonsus, "is not puffed up by success, or cast down by misfortune. He knows that everything comes equally from the hand of God. The divine good-pleasure being the sole rule of his desires, he does nothing but what God wills, and wills nothing but what God does. . . . He accepts with entire conformity of will all the dispositions of Providence, without considering whether they are according or opposed to his natural inclinations. The friends of St. Vincent de Paul used to say of him during his life: Monsieur Vincent is always Vincent. They meant that in all circumstances, favourable or otherwise, the Saint appeared equally calm, always like himself; for, having perfectly abandoned himself to the disposal of God, he lived without fear, and had no desire but the divine good-pleasure." <sup>10</sup>

"It is this holy evenness of mind I want to see you possessed of," said St. Francis de Sales to his spiritual

<sup>9</sup> *Am. env.*, c. ix.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*, *ibid.*

daughters. "Observe, I do not say evenness of humour or inclination, but evenness of mind. For I make no account, and I desire you to make no account of the troubles you may feel in the inferior part of your souls. But we must be always firm and resolute in the superior part, preserving a constant equanimity in adversity as well as in prosperity, in desolation as well as in consolation, in aridities as well as in sensible sweetnesses. Doves mourn in the same manner as they rejoice: they have but one same song to express grief and gladness. Behold them perched on the branch of a tree where they lament the loss of their little ones; behold them again when they are quite happy: the tune does not change, it is an unvarying cooing which they use to manifest both joy and sorrow. Job provides us with an illustrious example on this subject, for he sang to the same air all the canticles which he composed. When the Lord caused his goods to multiply and gave him everything he could wish for in this life, what did he say but: Blessed be the name of the Lord! This was his canticle of love on every occasion. Reduced to the extremity of affliction, what does he do? He sings his canticle of lamentation to the same air exactly as his canticle of joy. 'The Lord,' said he, 'hath given me my children and my goods, and the Lord hath taken them from me again. Blessed be the name of the Lord! May the name of the Lord be forever blessed!' So should we, on all occasions, accept good things and evil, consolations and afflictions, from the hand of God, always singing the same sweet song: Blessed be the name of the Lord; and always to the air of an imperturbable equanimity."<sup>11</sup>

This equanimity, so pleasant and desirable, St. Francis de Sales possessed himself in an eminent degree. And St. Jane de Chantal will tell us where he found it. "His method was to keep himself very humble, very small, and profoundly abased before the Majesty of God, with a singular reverence and confidence as of a loving and

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<sup>11</sup> *Entret.*, vii.



beloved child. I believe that, in his last years, he willed nothing, loved nothing, saw nothing but God in all things. So he seemed to be entirely absorbed in God; and he used to say that there was nothing in the whole world except God could give him any contentment. From this perfect union proceeded that absolute and universal indifference which one ordinarily noticed in him. And certainly, whilst reading the chapters in Book IX of his *Amour divin* which treat of this subject, I clearly perceive that he practised what he taught, according to the occasion. The maxim, so little known and yet so excellent: Ask nothing, desire nothing, refuse nothing: which he so faithfully made the rule of his conduct until the end of his life, could only have come from a soul absolutely indifferent and dead to self. His equanimity was wonderful. Who ever saw him show the least sign of disturbance in any circumstances? Nevertheless, I have seen him subjected to violent assaults. It was not that he felt no strong resentment, especially when God was offended or his neighbour oppressed. On such occasions, one saw him holding himself resolutely in silence and withdrawing into his interior with God; and there he remained, still silent, yet without neglecting to take prompt measures to repair the evil done. For he was the refuge, the comfort, and the support of all.”<sup>12</sup> Happy those who possess this constant equanimity! Happy also those who live with them!

#### ARTICLE IV.—PEACE AND JOY

Holy abandonment not alone secures to us the precious liberty of the children of God, and a sweet equanimity amidst all the instability of human affairs and the different accidents of life; it also obtains for us that profound peace and that interior joy which constitute our happiness here below. “It is only by the perfect conformity of our wills

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<sup>12</sup> *Vie de S. Fr. de Sales*, app.

with the will of God," writes Saint-Jure, "that we can acquire the most perfect peace which it is possible to taste in this world; the practice of such conformity creates for us a paradise on earth. Alphonsus the Great, King of Aragon and Naples, a very wise and enlightened ruler, was once asked who in his opinion was the happiest person in the world. 'He who has abandoned himself unreservedly to the guidance of God,' answered the Prince, 'and who welcomes every event, fortunate or otherwise, as coming from His hand.'"<sup>13</sup> The following passage is from Mgr. Gay: "'Submit to God,' said Eliphaz to Job, 'and thou shalt find peace,' a peace which elsewhere Holy Scripture describes as inexhaustible, a peace which is as a river, as a full-flowing river. The peaceful, that is to say, those who possess this treasure of peace in themselves and try to communicate it to others, shall be called, and are in truth, the children of God. And the children of God by excellence are the souls who abandon themselves entirely to Him. This people of my faithful ones, my little ones, my children, all abandoned to my care, 'shall sit in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence, and in wealthy rest' (*Is. xxxii, 18*), where nothing any more shall be wanting to their desire. David dwelt in those tabernacles and enjoyed that wealthy rest when he sang the sweet psalm which might well be called the song of abandonment: 'The Lord ruleth me, and I shall want nothing; He hath set me in a place of pasture; He hath brought me up on the water of refreshment; He hath converted my soul; He hath led me into the paths of justice for His name's sake,' that is, for the sake of Jesus, His only-begotten Son. And now, O my Master, my Guide, O Providence, my Mother! 'though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me. Thy rod (which points out the way for me) and Thy staff (wherewith Thou strikest me to force me back whenever I begin to wander) they have comforted me' (*Ps. xxii*). No doubt of it!

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<sup>13</sup> *Conn. et am.*, I, iii, c. viii.

Abandonment produces peace, a profound, perfect, imperturbable peace." <sup>14</sup>

"Assuredly," says Saint-Jure, "the souls that follow this way (of abandonment) enjoy an unalterable calm, and pass their lives in a peace which they alone can comprehend, and which it would be impossible to find elsewhere in this world. St. Catherine of Sienna tells us that Our Lord instructed her to build a cloister in her heart with the hard stone of Divine Providence, and to confine herself therein perpetually, because so she would be assured of happiness, and find perfect peace of soul, and a shelter from all tribulations and tempests. And, in truth, can one imagine a state more happy than that in which the soul is carried, rests, and slumbers like an infant in the omnipotent arms of Divine Providence?" Do you desire, asks the same author, another luminous illustration of the happiness of such a soul? Consider Noe during the deluge. "Because God conducted him, he lived peacefully in the ark with the lions, the tigers, and the bears, whilst all his fellow-men, amidst the strangest confusion of body and mind, were being mercilessly swallowed up by the hungry waters. Similarly, the soul that abandons herself to Providence and relinquishes to it the helm of her ark, will enjoy perfect peace in the midst of all kinds of trouble; she will float in tranquillity over the ocean of this life; whereas the 'undisciplined souls,' fugitive slaves in mutiny against Providence, live in continual agitation, and as they have for pilot their own blind and inconstant wills, after being a long time the sport of winds and waves they end at last in a lamentable shipwreck." <sup>15</sup>

In fact, asks Mgr. Gay, "what is it that troubles you? I am not speaking of the troubles that agitate the surface. It is sufficient to be sensitive to be inevitably subject to these. But I speak of the trouble which invades the very centre of the soul and there attacks the virtues. What

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<sup>14</sup> *Vie et vert. Chrét.*, Abandon, iii.

<sup>15</sup> *Am. et Conn.*, I, iii, c. viii.

can be the cause of it? Perhaps the orders you receive, or the accidents that befall you? No, because the trial which robs you of your peace has no such effect on your fellow-religious. How explain this? Very easily. The will of your fellow-religious is abandoned to God, whereas yours retains control of itself and offers resistance. The trouble, consequently, is due to self-will, and the opposition it makes to God. Here is the cause of all your agitations and inquietudes. Abandonment makes them impossible." <sup>16</sup>

For abandoned souls have succeeded in merging their wills in the will of God. Consequently, nothing can happen contrary to their desires, nothing can disturb their peace, because nothing can befall them which is not in accordance with the divine will, and hence also with their own. "In my opinion," observes Salvien, "there is no happiness in the world comparable to that possessed by these souls. They are humbled and despised, indeed, but that is what they desire. They are poor, but poverty is for them the most prized of possessions. Therefore they are always content." <sup>17</sup> "Whatsoever shall befall the just man it shall not make him sad," says Divine Wisdom (Prov. xii, 21). Nothing can disturb the peace and serenity of his mind, because he has placed his confidence in God alone, and has accepted in advance all that his good Master may be pleased to ordain. This, obviously, is not the peace of paradise, but it is the most perfect peace possible here below. God does not will that we should enjoy absolute repose here on earth, or enduring happiness. We cannot avoid tribulation; the cross will pursue us whithersoever we go. But holy abandonment teaches us the great science of life, and the art of being happy even in this world, which consists in *knowing how to suffer*. To know how to suffer! That is to say, to suffer in the manner we should, to suffer all that God wills for us, and as He wills, in the spirit of faith, and with love and con-

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<sup>16</sup> *Vie et Vert.*, Abandon, iii.

<sup>17</sup> *De Prov.*, I, i.

fidence. Abandonment teaches us to repose between the arms of the cross, consequently in the arms of Jesus, and on His wounded Heart. There we discover something more than peace, for we participate in the very joy of Jesus.

“ Sometimes, and not very seldom,” writes Mgr. Gay, “ this joy is sensible. But at other times, and most often, it is purely spiritual.” At all events, abandonment produces the joy of the soul. “ For that, it would suffice to secure to us liberty and peace. In what should we rejoice if not in being free and peaceful, free in the truth, free in love, and peaceful in our freedom? And, on the other hand, without liberty and peace, what joy can one taste or even imagine?” Would you like to possess the secret of being always joyous? We call it a secret, because although all men seek after joy, very few discover it. Well, the secret of attaining to joy and preserving it when attained is holy abandonment. But how? Listen. Other people have too little faith, too little confidence and love to rejoice in tribulation. But those who have arrived at perfect conformity are endowed with a vivid faith, a firm hope, and a generous charity. They have learned to recognise in every event, even the most insignificant, their heavenly Father, their Saviour, their Spouse, their Friend, their Well-Beloved, busily occupied with the work of their sanctification. They have given Him without any reserve their confidence and their love. Is He not the Sovereign Master of all events? And in disposing them, can He forget His character of Father and Saviour? Consequently they feel assured that everything will turn to the profit of their souls, provided they remain trustfully, loyally submissive. How, then, can they help being joyous? On the sixth day of creation God contemplated the works of His hands, and He found them all good, and very good. Hence He vouchsafed to regard them with a joyous satisfaction. “ Similarly, the abandoned soul experiences in herself something resembling a participation of this divine joy. For the foundation of her abandon-

ment is precisely the approbation she gives to all that God does and wills, and the complacency she takes in all the dispositions of His Providence." <sup>18</sup>

"Here," says Rodriguez, "you have the whole secret of the perfect calm and unalterable joy which manifested themselves on the countenances, in the words, and in the actions of the saints in times past, such as St. Antony, St. Dominic, St. Francis Assisi. The same qualities were remarked, so we read, in St. Ignatius and distinguish, indeed, all true servants of God. But, it may be objected, perhaps these great saints were immune from all the miseries of life; perhaps they were not subject to bodily infirmities; perhaps they had no temptations to combat, no trials to support; perhaps, in fine, God removed from the path of His zealous servants every cause of affliction, every occasion of falling? Nothing could be farther from the truth. The crosses the saints had to support were far heavier than those of other men. Tribulations, sufferings and contempt were their portion in this life, and their crowns were always woven of thorns. God reserves His sharpest trials for the souls He loves most dearly. But these holy men had brought their wills into perfect conformity with the will of God. Hence, pains, mortifications, even temptations, became for them a source of joy and consolation, because they knew that all was the work of the divine will in which they placed the whole of their happiness." <sup>19</sup> They were ingenious in discovering a thousand pious reasons for approving the ways of Providence, even when most trying, and for encouraging themselves to a confident and joyous submission thereto.

Let us hear the holy Curé of Ars: "It is the cross that has given peace to the world, and it is the cross that must bring peace to our hearts also. All our miseries come from the fact that we do not love the cross. Fear of the cross only adds to the weight of it. A cross carried cheerfully

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<sup>18</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> *Perf. Chrét.*, tr. viii, c. iv.

ceases to be a burden.<sup>20</sup> Nothing gives us such a resemblance to Our Lord as the carrying of His cross. All pains become sweet when suffered in union with Him. I cannot understand how any Christian is capable of refusing to love the cross and of fleeing from it. Does he not at the same time flee from Him Who has willed to be attached to the cross and to die upon it for our sakes? Contradictions bring us to the foot of the cross, and the cross to the gates of paradise. To arrive there, we must be trampled on, scorned, despised, broken to pieces. Suffering! What does it matter? It will be all over in a moment. If we could only go and spend eight days in heaven, we should understand the value of this momentary suffering; we should find no cross too heavy, no trial too bitter. The cross is the present which God makes to His friends. Let us pray for a love of the cross, then it will become sweet. I speak from an experience of four or five years. I have had my full share of calumny, contradiction, and oppression. Oh, yes! Crosses have been laid upon my shoulders, too, and almost more than I could carry. But I applied myself to pray for a love of the cross, and then I became so happy that I said to myself: Really, the cross brings me nothing but joy. We need never consider whence crosses come to us; ultimately they come always from God. It is always God Who provides us with the means of proving our love for Him. Oh, when the day of judgment comes, how happy we shall feel on account of our misfortunes in this life, how proud of our humiliations, how rich by reason of our sacrifices!"<sup>21</sup>

For Gemma Galgani a day without suffering was a day lost. "There have been days," she lamented, "when I had nothing to offer to my Jesus in the evening. Oh, how unfortunate I was!" In the course of a protracted trial which still endured, Our Lord asked her if she suffered

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<sup>20</sup> A holy religieuse was accustomed to say: "We make crosses for ourselves when we oppose our wills to the will of God. Let us conform them, and so make the two wills parallel, as two rails along which we shall run swiftly and surely to paradise."

<sup>21</sup> Monnin, *Curé d'Ars*, I, iii, c. iii.

much: "To suffer in union with Thee is a happiness," she replied.<sup>22</sup>

"I have just recited the rosary," wrote a pious religieuse to her director, "to thank the good God for having put me in the crucible of suffering. This morning, after Communion, I said the *Magnificat*. I have no longer any consolation but to suffer with Jesus and for Jesus, if He will condescend to accept my sufferings. To suffer, to suffer still, to suffer more: this is my continual prayer."

Wasted by illness, tortured by fever, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity wrote as follows during the last days of her life: "The way to Calvary opens before me, and I am so happy to walk in it as a spouse by the side of my crucified Love. Oh, if you only knew what divinely happy days I am spending! I am getting weak, and I feel that it will not be very long before the Divine Master comes to seek me. But I taste, I experience joys unheard of, the joys of suffering, which are so sweet and delightful. I think I am almost in heaven in this little cell, alone with God alone, bearing my cross with my well-beloved Master. My happiness increases in proportion to my sufferings. If you knew what sweetness is found at the bottom of the chalice prepared by our heavenly Father!"<sup>23</sup>

"From the moment when I renounced self-seeking for ever," said St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, "I have lived the happiest life imaginable." And in fact suffering became for her a heaven on earth. She used to welcome it with a smile, as we welcome a piece of good fortune. "When I suffer much," she said, "when bitter trials befall me, instead of assuming an air of sadness, I greet them with a smile. At first I used not to be always successful; but now I am in such a state that I can no longer really suffer at all, because every suffering is a delight to me." "Why do you look so happy this morning?" "It is because I have had two little pains. There is nothing

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<sup>22</sup> Germain, *Gem. Gal.*, c. xv.

<sup>23</sup> *Souvenirs*, cc. xxiv-v.



that can give me little joys like little pains.” “ You have had a good many trials to-day ? ” “ Oh, yes, indeed, but it is because I love them. I love everything the good God gives me. My heart is full of the will of Jesus.” <sup>24</sup>

Let us now hear Tauler in the famous Dialogue between the Theologian and the Beggar. “ A theologian—Tauler himself—implored of God during eight years to send him a man who would point out to him the way of truth. One day when he felt this desire stronger than ever, he heard a voice from heaven saying to him : ‘ Go out to the steps of the church, and there you shall meet one that will teach you the way of truth.’ Issuing forth, he found a beggar very shabbily dressed, and with feet bare, wounded, and muddy. He saluted him with the words : ‘ May God give you a good day.’ To which the beggar replied : ‘ I do not remember having ever had a bad day.’ ‘ Well, may God make you happy, then,’ said the theologian. And to this he received the answer : ‘ But I have never been otherwise than happy.’ ‘ God bless you,’ said then the theologian, ‘ but I wish you would speak more plainly, for I cannot comprehend what you say.’ ‘ I will do so gladly,’ was the reply. ‘ You wished me a good day, and I answered that I cannot recall having ever spent a bad day. For, when famishing with hunger I praise God ; when I suffer from the cold, when it hails, snows or rains, when the weather is calm or stormy, I praise God equally ; when I am in want, when I am rebuffed and despised I still praise God : and consequently I know not what it is to have a bad day. You next wished me a good and happy life, and I replied that I have never been otherwise than happy. That is perfectly true. For I have learned how to live with God, and I am convinced that whatever He does must necessarily be very good. Hence, everything which I receive from God or which He permits that I receive from others, prosperity or adversity, sweet or bitter, I regard as a particular favour, and I accept it with joy from His hand. Besides, it is my

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<sup>24</sup> *Histoire*, c. xii.

firm resolution never to attach myself to anything but the will of God alone; and I have so merged my own will in His that whatsoever He wills I will also. Therefore, I have been always happy.' 'But what would you say,' inquired the theologian, 'if God willed to precipitate you to the bottom of the abyss?' 'Precipitate me to the bottom of the abyss? If God willed that, I have two arms where-with I would clasp Him in a close embrace: with the left arm, which is humility, I would lay hold on His Sacred Humanity and cling to It with all my strength; with the right arm, which is love, I would attach myself to His Divinity, so that He could not cast me into hell without Himself coming with me; and I should much rather be in hell with Him than in heaven without Him.' From this the theologian recognised that perfect resignation, joined to profound humility, is the shortest road that leads to God. 'Whence come you,' he further inquired. 'From God.' 'Where did you find Him?' 'There where I left all creatures.' 'Where has He His dwelling?' 'In pure hearts and in men of good-will.' 'Then what are you?' 'I am a king.' 'Where is your kingdom?' 'In my soul, because I have learned to rule both my internal and external senses, in such a way that all the affections and faculties of my soul are entirely subject to me. And this kingdom, as nobody can doubt, is more valuable than all the kingdoms of the earth.' 'What means did you employ to attain to such a height of perfection?' 'Silence, deep meditation, and union with God. I could find no rest in anything which was not my God. Now I have found Him, and in Him I enjoy perfect repose and unalterable peace.' Such was the conversation carried on between the theologian, Tauler, and the poor beggar who by the perfect conformity of his will with the will of God was richer in his poverty than any earthly monarch, and happier in his sufferings than are those to whose enjoyment the elements and the whole of nature minister.' <sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Saint-Jure, *Conn. et Am.*, I, iii, c. viii.

## ARTICLE V.—A HOLY DEATH AND POWER WITH GOD

According as we have become more perfect in abandonment, we have become proportionately more detached from all earthly objects and more intimately united to God alone. Faith, confidence, love, and all the other virtues, have developed in our souls to an astonishing degree. The union of our wills with the will of God has been daily growing stronger. Final perseverance is always the grace of graces, the gratuitous gift by excellence. But there is nothing comparable to holy abandonment for inclining our Father in heaven to bestow upon us that decisive grace. He pursues the sinner that flees from His embrace: can He possibly reject those that live only by love and filial submission? Let us but continue steadfast in this way until the end, and assuredly we shall see ourselves saved, yea, saved in the manner of the saints. Speaking even of ordinary Christians, the pious Bishop of Geneva was accustomed to say: "It is impossible for Almighty God to condemn a soul that separates from the body with her will resigned to the divine will. Our wills shall continue forever in the dispositions in which death finds them. As the tree fall, so it remains."<sup>26</sup> Hence we read that when assisting at a death-bed, he used all his endeavours to get the patient to submit his will unreservedly to the will of God, and hardly spoke to him of anything else.

Death will part us from our possessions and our positions, from our relatives and our bodies. Cruelly painful partings for souls attached to temporal things. But for those who have firmly established themselves in holy abandonment they have not at all the same bitterness. For abandonment makes us virtuously indifferent to everything which death will forcibly deprive us of: let it come when it pleases; the sacrifice has already been accomplished in our hearts, and we no longer cling to anything that it can take from us. God is the only Object

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<sup>26</sup> *Esprit*, iii, 42.

of our affections; and it is precisely death which, separating us from all else, will unite us inseparably to Him.

Death will be accompanied by a terrible cortege of sufferings and temptations. It is the final combat, the greatest and most distressing trial of all. And there is nothing like abandonment to prepare us for the dread ordeal, because it trains us to receive everything from the hand of God with love and confidence, and to discharge our duties bravely even under the weight of the cross, supporting us with the thought of the divine power and goodness. Hence, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus was able to say with justifiable assurance: "I have no fear of the final combats, or of the sufferings due to my sickness, however trying they may be. The good God has always supported me; He has helped me and led me by the hand from earliest childhood.... And I confidently count upon His assistance at the last. My Sufferings may be most extreme, but I am sure He will never abandon me." <sup>27</sup>

The passage from time to eternity is a thing supremely impressive even for the holiest. "How solemn is the hour in which I find myself!" exclaimed Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity. "The thought of the great beyond thrills my soul. It seemed to me that I had for long been living there, and nevertheless I find now it is an unknown country. . . . I experience an indefinable sentiment, some strange emotion from the nearness of the justice and sanctity of God. And I find myself so little, so empty of all merit! Oh, how necessary it is to encourage the agonising, to inspire them with confidence!" <sup>28</sup> "Oh, if you only knew how necessary it is to pray for the dying," echoed St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. And in fact, after a life so pure and holy, she herself in her last illness heard a malignant voice whisper: "Are you certain of being loved by God? Has He come to assure you of it?" This caused her indescribable

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<sup>27</sup> *Histoire*, c. xii.

<sup>28</sup> *Souvenirs*, c. xvii.

anguish, which lasted several days.<sup>29</sup> "O father," said St. Jane de Chantal on her death-bed, to her confessor, "I can assure you that the judgments of God are terrifying." He asked her if she felt any fear. "No," she replied, "but I repeat: the judgments of God are terrifying."<sup>30</sup> It is the cry of poor nature in extremity; it is the shock of that decisive moment, unspeakably solemn; it is the anguish of a sensitive conscience, alarmed by its every humility. The soul that lives in holy abandonment will triumph over this fear. She will neglect no means of completing her preparation. But above all she will bear in mind that she is at last going to see her Father, her Friend, her Well-Beloved, Him in Whom she has placed all her delight, the God of her heart to Whom she has never ceased to immolate her life, moment by moment. She will review with sweet emotion the countless proofs she has received of His love, His mercy, and His unutterable tenderness. She will feel that she loves Him with all her heart, and that she is loved even more dearly in return. Oh, how happy she will be to say to Him, with the Psalmist, at this solemn and decisive hour: "Thou art my God: my lot is in Thy hands" (Ps. xxx, 15-16). Briefly, she has lived a life of love and confidence, and she will pass through death with love and confidence. After lives so full of interior pains, Sts. Jane de Chantal and Alphonsus de' Liguori died very peacefully. Perhaps God will be pleased to keep us on the cross even to the end. But it is not rare to see abandoned souls pass away without any fears, and go into eternity tranquil and joyous, as a child entering its parents' home, or as a religious entering choir to sing the divine praises. Such was the death of the Blessed Marie-Madeleine Postel: "She showed no weakness during her last moments, and no sign of fear. Having been so perfectly submissive to the will of God all her life long, she could hardly have been otherwise at the end. Her last moments, therefore, were

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<sup>29</sup> *Histoire*, c. xii.

<sup>30</sup> Bougaud, *Hist. de Ste. Chantal*, c. xxxiv.

full of calm, confidence, and abandonment. The chaplain exhorted her to offer up the sacrifice of her life. 'It costs me nothing,' she answered. 'May the will of the good God be done in all things!' Her spiritual daughters, overjoyed to behold her so calm and peaceful, inquired if she was happy. 'Yes,' she replied, 'so happy!' Her countenance recovered all the grace of youth. She looked quite radiant with happiness, like a soul that had already entered paradise. And she never ceased to keep herself united to her Well-Beloved by acts of faith and loving aspirations." <sup>31</sup>

At this awful hour, no one ever finds himself pure enough from stain or rich enough in merit. True. But holy abandonment is undoubtedly the best means for making the most out of the last decisive trial. Oh, what immense merit we may acquire by submitting with loving patience to the cruel work of dissolution, by receiving from the hand of God, with filial confidence, the bitter cup of death! Here, in truth, is an opportunity to add another magnificent sheaf of merits to those already harvested, and the sheaf richest of all in the finest of grain. It is also an opportunity to make a very agreeable offering to the divine justice, and perhaps an adequate expiation of our sins. According to St. Alphonsus: "To accept the death which God presents to us, in order to conform ourselves to His holy will, merits a recompense similar to that of martyrdom. For men become martyrs only by accepting torments and death in order to please God. He who dies with his will conformed to the divine will dies a holy death, and he who dies in perfect conformity dies a perfectly holy death. Louis de Blois has said that one act of perfect conformity at the moment of death suffices to preserve us not only from hell, but even from purgatory." <sup>32</sup>

But at least, is it not a cause of anguish to leave behind us, in exile, in danger, perhaps in distress, all those

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<sup>31</sup> Legoux, *La Bse. Marie-Mad. Postel*, c. xxxii.

<sup>32</sup> *Reg. de vie*, iii.

whom, after God, we have most dearly loved in life: our relatives, our religious brethren, and possibly other dear ones to whom we have been a support? The Blessed Marie-Madeleine left after her an infant Congregation, hardly founded, and in the greatest destitution. But “during her life she had been only the instrument of Providence, and so she died without the least anxiety as to the fate of her Institute. In health, she had never relied on her own arm of flesh; and now in her last moments she still placed all her confidence in God alone.”<sup>33</sup> All those whom we have loved on earth, we shall not cease to love in heaven. Far from it. Rather our love will there become stronger and more enlightened, and we shall be in a better position to watch over our friends and to promote their highest interests. Is not God the Sovereign Master of their destinies? And who will have as much influence with Him in heaven as they who have lived only by His love, in constant fidelity to all the duties imposed by His signified will, in perfect abandonment to His good pleasure? He has told us Himself that “He will do the will of them that fear Him, and will hear their prayer” (*Ps.* cxliv, 19). What can be more encouraging than this promise? Let us do the will of God, and He will in turn do ours; let us do all that He desires, and He will do all that we desire. This explains the wonderful intercessory power exercised by souls who live in loving and perfect conformity. As they refuse nothing to God, so neither will He refuse them anything. The power of their prayer, on earth and in heaven, will always be proportioned to the degree of their love, obedience, and abandonment. And if it pleases God to single out certain souls from amongst the very holiest for special glorification, we need not look elsewhere for an explanation of His choice.

Does this not explain, for instance, why St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus has become the great wonder-worker of our age? Towards the end of her life, she seems to have had a

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<sup>33</sup> Legoux, *op. cit.*, c. xxxii.

clear consciousness of her future mission. More than once she reveals the secret of it. "I desire to spend my heaven doing good upon earth," she says. "After my death I shall let fall a shower of roses. I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission to make God loved by others as I love Him, to communicate my little way to souls." "What, then, is the little way you desire to teach?" "It is the way of spiritual childhood, the way of trust and of total abandonment." Let us now hear the reason on which she grounds her confidence: "I have given God nothing but love, and He will love me in return. *He will accomplish all my desires in heaven, because on earth I have never done my own will.*"<sup>34</sup>

Let us conclude with a narrative which is well known, but which has a particular interest for us Cistercians. For the hero was a lay-brother of our own Order, the Blessed Aignan of Eberbach, and the narrator also is one of our own, the Blessed Cesar, prior of Heisterbach. In the monastery of Eberbach lived a saintly brother, distinguished particularly for his simplicity and obedience. God endowed him with so wonderful a gift of miracles that by merely touching his girdle or habit the sick and infirm were cured of all their ailments. Astonished at a favour so extraordinary, and seeing in the brother no special marks of sanctity, the abbot one day asked him how he explained the fact that God worked such prodigies through his instrumentality. "I don't understand it at all," replied the brother. "Neither in praying, nor in watching, nor in working, nor in fasting do I surpass my brethren. All I know is that in every event, fortunate or otherwise, I adore the will of the good God. I have made it a point always and in all things to will only that which God wills, and by His grace I have entirely abandoned my own will to His. Consequently, I am neither lifted up by prosperity nor cast down by adversity; for I receive everything with indifference as from the hand of God, and the only thing I pray for is that His holy will may be perfectly accomplished

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<sup>34</sup> *Histoire*, c. xii; et *Souvenirs*.



in me and in all creatures." "But," said the abbot, "did you not feel some little emotion the other day, when a malevolent hand set fire to the grange and deprived us of the means of subsistence?" "No, reverend father. I even gave thanks to God for that occurrence, as I am accustomed to do in all such happenings, being convinced that the Lord neither does nor permits anything which is not for His own greater glory and for our highest interests. Therefore, happen what will, I am always perfectly satisfied." After this response, which revealed a soul completely conformed to God's holy will, the abbot was no longer surprised to see the brother working such great signs and wonders.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cesaire, *Dial.*, 1, x, c. vi; St. Lig. *Conf.*, 2.

## CONCLUSION

**L**ET us now briefly summarise this lengthy work, in order to place in relief the practical conclusions which flow from it.

The divine will is the supreme rule of our life, the criterion of what is good, of what is better, of what is perfect. The more completely we conform ourselves to it, the holier we become.

There is the signified will of God, to which corresponds obedience. For us religious, it is chiefly manifested through our holy rule and the orders of our superiors. On the side of God, it is a stable and permanent government; with regard to ourselves, it represents our daily and life-long duties. Obedience must therefore be for us the great means of sanctification.

There is also the divine good-pleasure, to which answers the conformity of our wills. It becomes known to us through the sequence of events. And like the events that reveal it, it has the appearance of being variable, casual, sometimes disconcerting; in fact, however, it is always the wise and paternal will of God. The rule has been made for the guidance of the community, but the divine good-pleasure provides for our more personal needs. It does not by any means supplant the rule. On the contrary, it reinforces the action of the rule with its own, which is always beneficent, often very efficacious, sometimes even decisive. If we are truly spiritual, we shall attach ourselves lovingly to the whole will of God, both the signified will and the will of good-pleasure, in order to gather all the fruits of sanctity which it puts within our reach.

The conformity begotten of fear, or simple resignation, suffices to produce very salutary effects, and there is no one without the power and the obligation to practise it. The conformity which comes from hope is loftier in its

motive and richer in its results; it is accessible to all persons of piety. But incomparably the noblest, most meritorious, and happiest conformity is that which love produces; when this passes into a fixed habit it is the way of the perfect. And it is this kind of conformity, absolute, loving, and filial, that we have been studying under the name of abandonment.

Holy abandonment perfects in us, with as much force as sweetness, universal detachment, divine love, and all the other virtues. It is the most powerful, yet the sweetest, chain to hold our wills captive under the will of God, in a union of hearts full of humble confidence and affectionate intimacy. To holy abandonment belongs, in a most particular sense, the secret of securing to us liberty of soul, constant equanimity, peace and joy of heart. It obtains for us also a delightful repose in God, and, what is still more precious, it is the producer of the noblest virtues and the safest guide to sanctity. Taking us by the hand, in concert with obedience, it guides us surely in the paths of perfection, prepares for us a happy death, and elevates us to the loftiest regions of paradise. It is the true ideal of the interior life. What enlightened soul would not aspire to it with all the eagerness of inflamed ardour? If only we better realised its worth, we would strive with all our power to tend to it, to attain to it, to establish ourselves solidly in it, and daily to make new progress in it. Assuredly, we cannot obtain it without paying the price. But once it has become ours, will not such a treasure compensate us abundantly for the cost of acquisition? What, then, have we to do in order to acquire it?

Holy abandonment, as we have seen, supposes three antecedent conditions: a universal detachment, a vivid faith, and an absolute confidence in Divine Providence.

Let us, therefore, carefully practise interior mortification, and strive to render ourselves virtuously indifferent to temporal goods and evils, to health and sickness, to aridities and consolations, to all, in short, that is not God

or His holy will, so that He can dispose of us as best pleases Him without any resistance on our part. And forasmuch as nature has its deepest roots in pride and independence, we must cultivate obedience and humility with most particular attention.

Let us strive to advance daily in faith and in trustful submission to Providence. Chance is but a meaningless word. It is God Who directs the mighty events of the world as well as the smallest incidents of our lives. In the execution of His designs He employs secondary causes, but independently of Him they have no action. The wicked no less than the just are instruments in His hand, with or without their consent. In His own good time He will punish the former and recompense the latter; but meanwhile He wills to avail of their vices and virtues for our spiritual advancement. Even sins have no power to frustrate His purposes, for He has foreseen them all and makes them actually concur to the attainment of His ends. Now, He Who has disposed all, and is the Sovereign Master of men and events, is our own infinitely wise and good Father, our Saviour Who has laid down His very life for us, the Spirit of Love Who is always occupied with the work of our sanctification. Undoubtedly He seeks His glory in all His actions, but He has constituted His glory in making us good and happy. Consequently, in all things He pursues the well-being of the Church and of souls. He takes thought in particular for our eternity; for He loves us in His own way, which is the only wise way. If He crucifies the old man in us, it is only in order to vivify the child of God. Even when He strikes us hard, His love directs His arm, and His wisdom measures the weight of the blow. But, alas! we do not always understand, and sometimes we are disappointed and disconcerted at the ways of Providence. The good Master might address to us the words He spoke to St. Gertrude: "I wish My friends would not think Me so cruel. They should have the goodness to believe that I use severity only for their advantage, for their greatest advantage. It

is My love for them that animates Me; and if it were not necessary to cure them of their defects and to multiply their degrees of eternal glory, I would not permit so much as a breath of wind to oppose them." Jesus, instructing His faithful spouse, "made her comprehend, little by little, that everything comes to the just from the hands of God; that sufferings and humiliations are of inestimable value and the most precious gifts of Divine Providence, that spiritual infirmities, temptations, even our faults become through His grace the most powerful means of sanctification. He also showed her how He hears the prayers of His friends, even when, as often, they imagine themselves forgotten or repulsed; how it is the intention that gives value to our actions in His eyes; how, when we fail in our undertakings for His glory, He accepts the good-will for the deed. He further revealed to her the sovereign excellence of complete abandonment to the divine good-pleasure, and the joy it gives His Sacred Heart to see a soul surrendering herself blindly to the care of His Providence and His love." <sup>1</sup>

St. Gertrude understood these divine instructions. She engraved them so deeply on her heart that she could repeat, with her adorable Master, on every occasion: "Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight" (*Matt.* xi, 26). If we also desire to sing incessantly this song of holy abandonment, we must penetrate our souls with the same salutary truths, we must nourish ourselves with them in prayer and in pious reading, so as gradually to conform our minds to the spirit of the Gospel. Further, we must never close our eyes to this light of faith in order to see only the disturbing side of events. This is a matter of the most vital importance. For our proud and sensual nature does not like to be opposed, to be humbled, to be troubled, to lose its enjoyments and to be saturated with sufferings. It will grumble. When it feels the pain, it will murmur at the trial and against those whom it considers responsible for it. It will forget God, the real

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<sup>1</sup> Cros, *Coeur de Ste. Gertrude*, c. ix, 2.

Author of the trial, and give no thought to the fruits of sanctity that He expects from it. Hence, a world of discontent, disquietude and bitterness. Such morbid agitation ought to make us comprehend that our eyes are wandering and our wills wavering. Oh, how happy and wise is he who sees the hand of our heavenly Father in all events, fortunate or unfavourable, and looks at them only in the light of eternity!

But if universal detachment, vivid faith, and confidence in Divine Providence prepare us admirably for holy abandonment, it is the love of God that actually fixes us in that happy state. To divine love alone it belongs to merge our wills in the will of God, and to invest this closest of unions with the character of affectionate intimacy and filial trust that distinguishes abandoned souls. But it effects this metamorphosis of our wills, this total surrender of ourselves, as it were, naturally. For such is the tendency of love, such its instinct, and only at this price can it rest satisfied: in giving the heart, it gives also the will, gives itself whole and entire, without any reserve or division. So, at least, it acts when it has attained its full development. Consequently, the science of abandonment is nothing else than the science of holy love. And hence, to advance in the perfect conformity of abandonment, we must strive to increase in love, not the imperfect love which hides a secret self-seeking, but the absolutely pure love which wisely forgets its own interests to give itself unreservedly to God. Rich in faith, in confidence, and in love, we are now perfectly disposed to receive with respect and submission all the events of the divine good-pleasure according as they actually occur, or to await them with a sweet tranquillity and in a trustful peace of mind. Whilst discharging the duties imposed by the signified will of God, and without omitting the precautions and personal efforts which prudence prescribes, we easily banish trouble and agitation, and we sweetly repose in the arms of Providence as a child on its mother's breast.

But, like all the other virtues, holy abandonment must be

acquired by a repetition of acts, and particularly in prayer. Universal detachment, faith, confidence, and love, are only possible through grace. And we need an abundance of grace to acquire these virtues in the high degree demanded by holy abandonment. Hence the necessity of prayer. St. Alphonsus assures us that we can never dispense with prayer, no matter in what state we find ourselves, even in consolation, peace and prosperity; much less under the blows of adversity, in temptations, obscurities, and trials of every description. He recommends us "to say to God: Lord, lead me by whatever way Thou pleasest. Only grant that I may do Thy will: I desire nothing more." Certainly, we have the right to beg of the Lord to lighten our burden. But St. Alphonsus invites us to a more generous disposition: "Blessed spouse of Jesus," he writes in his work, *The Nun Sanctified*, "form the habit of offering yourself to God unceasingly in prayer. Protest that for love of Him you are ready to endure every pain of mind or body, every sort of desolation, infirmity, insult, or persecution; and do not omit to pray also for the grace to accomplish in everything that may befall you His holy will." However, we would not advise souls, ordinarily, to pray for sufferings. We believe also that instead of specifying crosses too closely, it would be more prudent to accept in general all those which God has destined for us, trusting to His goodness and discretion.

"Follow likewise," continues St. Alphonsus, "this most important counsel given by the masters of the spiritual life: Whenever any great adversity befalls, nothing is more profitable than to make this very misfortune the subject of our prayer, and consequently the object of repeated acts of resignation. The saints esteemed no exercise more highly than the continual union of their wills with the will of God. St. Peter Alcantara practised it even in his sleep. And St. Gertrude repeated three hundred times a day: 'My Jesus, let not my will but Thine be done.'"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Relig. sanct.*, c. xiv.

St. Francis de Sales recommended St. Jane de Chantal "to make a particular practice of approving and loving the will of God with more energy, tenderness, and affection than anything else in the world, and that even in occurrences which appear insupportable. Cast your eyes on the general will of God whereby He decrees all the works of His mercy and of His justice in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and with most profound humility approve, praise, and love that sovereign will, all holy, all equitable, all beautiful. Cast your eyes on the special will of God whereby He loves His own. Consider the variety of consolations, but above all the variety of tribulations which are the portion of the good. And again, with profound humility approve, praise and love this special will. Consider this same will in what has regard to yourself particularly, in all that happens or can happen to you, whether of good or evil, sin excepted. Then approve, praise and love all such occurrences, protesting that you desire always to honour, cherish, and adore this sovereign will, recommending to its mercy yourself and all your friends, me amongst them. Conclude, in fine, with a great act of confidence that this will shall do everything conducive to our good and happiness. After practising this exercise two or three times in this manner, you will be able to shorten it, to diversify or modify it, according as you may find convenient. For we should familiarise our hearts with it by frequent repetition." <sup>3</sup>

Madame Elizabeth, in the prison whence she was to emerge only to mount the scaffold, used to repeat every morning the following prayer: "My God, what is going to happen to me to-day? I know not. All I know is that nothing can happen which Thou hast not foreseen, regulated, and designed from all eternity. That is enough for me, my God; that suffices. I adore Thy impenetrable designs, and for the love of Thee I submit to them with all my heart. I will everything which Thou

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<sup>3</sup> *Lettres*, 432 et 434.



hast ordained, I accept everything, I make a sacrifice of everything; and I unite this sacrifice of mine to that of Jesus Christ, my Divine Saviour. I implore of Thee in His name and through His infinite merits the grace of patience in my sufferings and the perfect submission that is due to Thee in all that Thou dost will or permit. Amen."

Let us from time to time say with Saint-Jure: "O my Lord and my God, I will and approve all things Thou mayest will, whenever, however, and for whatsoever ends Thou mayest will them: cold, heat, rain, snow, storm, frost, famine, plague, and all the irregularities of the elements; hunger, thirst, poverty, infamy, outrage, disgust, weariness, and all other miseries. I abandon myself to Thee with a submissive heart, so that Thou mayest dispose of me in these and all things according to Thy good-pleasure. With regard to illnesses, Thou knowest those which Thou hast destined for me. I will them, and from this moment I accept them and embrace them in spirit, immolating myself to Thy divine and adorable will. I will those, and not others, because it is those that Thou willest. I accept them with perfect conformity to Thy will and as Thou hast ordained them, both as to the time of their coming, their duration, and their character and qualities. I want them neither graver nor lighter, neither of longer or shorter duration, neither sharper nor milder, but only as Thou hast been pleased to determine." With regard to all things whatsoever, "O my Lord and my God, I abandon myself and surrender myself entirely to Thee. I commit to Thee my body, my soul, my possessions, my honour, my life and my death. I adore all Thy designs in my regard. And with my whole heart I pray that everything which Thou hast decreed concerning me in time and eternity shall be accomplished as perfectly as possible." <sup>4</sup>

It is easy enough to elicit such acts so long as we have no trial to support. But it is when the cross presses

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<sup>4</sup> *Ob. cit.*, I, iii, c. viii.

heavily upon us that we have the most urgent need to produce them. "Instead of losing time complaining of men or fortune," says De la Columbière, "go quickly and cast yourself at the feet of the good Master, and ask Him for the grace to endure the trial with patience. A man who has received a dangerous wound, will not, if he is wise, run after his assailant, but will hasten to the physician who can heal him. Besides, even if you are resolved on seeking the author of your troubles, it is still to God you must have recourse, for He alone can be the ultimate cause of them. Go, then, to God, but go promptly, go immediately, let this be your very first care. Go and restore to Him, as it were, the shaft He has shot at you, the whip He has used to beat you. Kiss a thousand times the hands of your crucifix, those hands which have struck you and caused all the evil that distresses you. Repeat often to your Saviour those beautiful words which He Himself in His cruel agony spoke to His heavenly Father: 'Father, not My will but Thine be done.' I bless Thee with all my heart. I thank Thee for that Thou hast accomplished Thy designs in me; and though it should be in my power to resist Thine ordinances, I will never cease to be submissive thereto. I accept the present trial with all its circumstances. I complain neither of the evil I suffer, nor of the persons who have caused it, nor of the manner of its happening, nor of the place or time in which it has befallen me. For I know that all has been willed by Thee, and I would rather die than oppose Thy will in anything whatsoever. Yes, O my God, as to everything Thou wilt in me and in all men, to-day and at all times, in heaven and on earth, may Thy holy will be done. Only let it be done on earth as it is done in heaven." <sup>5</sup>

This holy and adorable will, whether the signified will or the will of good-pleasure, if we knew how to recognise it always, to approve it always, to embrace it always, and always to accomplish it with our whole hearts and with

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<sup>5</sup> *Serm.*, lxxvii.

love and fidelity, as the angels and saints do in heaven : this divine will, I say, would quickly transform the face of the world : sanctity would flourish everywhere, there would be a constant abounding joy in all hearts, charity would reign amongst men and peace in families and nations. Notwithstanding trials, our lives would flow on in sweetness and happiness, perfumed with confidence and holy love, enriched with virtues and merits. Gladly, when our last moment came, we should quit this exile for our homeland ; and far from fearing a stern judge in God, we should be impatient to go to our heavenly Father. Earth would thus become an anticipated paradise, and in the real paradise would await us a superabundant wealth of glory and bliss. Oh, how they should bless the Lord, they who have learned to love Him and to follow Him with affectionate confidence whithersoever He leads them ! And how miserably are they deceived who do not sufficiently trust their God, their Father, their Saviour, their Friend of friends, to allow Him to sanctify them and to make them happy ! Let us, at least, love our sweet Master, so wise and so good ; let us courageously accomplish whatever He wills ; and let us accept with confidence all that He appoints for us : this is all man, all the Christian, all the religious. It is the way of lofty virtues, the secret of happiness for time and eternity.

THE END.